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Perceptions and Expectations of College Students Choosing to Become Peer Mentors

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Perceptions and Expectations of College Students Choosing to Become Peer Mentors

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Matthew Hicks

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Abstract

Peer mentoring programs are a popular means of supporting students in transition in higher education. The success of these programs is based on the students who decide to become peer mentors. Further, institutions often have a variety of peer mentoring programs on their campuses that create varying experiences. The intent on this study was to identify best practices for recruiting peer mentors. The study utilized a quantitative instrument designed to reflect what previous literature suggested had been the positive outcomes of peer mentoring. A total of 110 student leaders at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville participated in the study, representing 11 peer mentoring roles. Levels of influence were measured for 13 different factors hypothesized to affect a student's decision to become a peer mentor. The results of the study suggested that the factors: helping fellow students, enhance leadership skills, and improve communication skills were most influential to college students choosing to become peer mentors. Additionally, it was found that different peer mentoring roles are influenced by factors at varying levels. Recommendations are provided to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of peer mentor recruitment campaigns. Recommendations include: creating a common marketing strategy for recruiting peer mentors at individual institutions, adjusting marketing strategies to recruit diverse peer mentors, intentionally recruiting to students who are mentees within a peer mentoring program, and developing a common recruitment timeline amongst peer mentoring roles at individual institutions.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

College students throughout the landscape of American higher education actively decide to take on leadership roles to help improve their collegiate experience, their campus community, and the experiences of their peers. The majority of universities and colleges throughout the United States currently facilitate peer mentoring programs which help foster student development throughout their campus communities (Brack, Millard & Shah, 2008). These programs are beneficial to mentees who are likely to encounter academic, social, and personal challenges while transitioning through their collegiate experience (Colvin & Ashman, 2010, Holt & Lopez, 2014). Mentoring programs also benefit the peer mentors whom serve as the student leaders (Bunting, Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson, 2012, Washburn & Zevallos, 2014a, Washburn & Zevallos, 2014b). Research on the benefits of peer mentoring for institutions and their students is providing an emerging foundation of literature which can inform the improvement of peer mentoring programs throughout higher education. As peer mentoring programs continue to grow in size and scope, it is important that they are supported by an understanding of why their students choose to become peer mentors.

Background

Peer mentoring is a broad term, which Harmon (2006) noted, is often hard to define because a single institution usually has multiple peer mentoring roles in which students engage under a variety of names. D'Abate (2009) defined peer mentors as experienced student leaders who provide support through developed relationships with less experienced students. D'Abate (2009) noted that these relationships can result in role modeling, socialization, the creation of a shared experience, the establishment of a support system, and a fostering of skill development

for the mentee and mentor. Newton and Ender (2000) suggested the definition is much more ambiguous; a peer mentor's role could include: serving as a source of institutional knowledge, orienting new students, making referrals to staff members, providing counseling and crisis intervention services, hosting social programs, enforcing rules, academic advising, community development, tutoring, financial management, and diversity education. These definitions are taken into account to form a unique definition of peer mentoring for the purpose of this study. This study defines peer mentoring as occurring when: an institutionally supported program facilitates a relationship amongst peers where one student is providing support for at least one peer. Peer mentoring can take place both inside and outside of an academic setting, and can be facilitated in a variety of ways. Some major examples of these peer mentoring roles include, but are not limited to: resident assistants, orientation leaders, peer health educators, peer diversity educators, mentors who support their peers through a first-year seminar, and pre-enrollment program peer mentors.

Problem Statement

Peer mentoring programs provide a variety of benefits to colleges and universities that directly extend to students who are being mentored (Harmon, 2006, Tinto, 2001, Washburn, 2008). Peer mentoring programs also benefit the students who choose to become peer mentors (Bunting et al., 2012, Colvin & Ashman, 2010, Harmon, 2006, Holt, 2012, Holt & Lopez, 2014). The spread of peer mentoring programs to campuses across the country highlights the mutual benefits of these programs between students and higher education staff members who are coordinating and facilitating the programs (Brack, et al., 2008).

The tendency of prior research on peer mentoring has been to focus on the outcomes of the peer mentoring experience. This remains true in terms of outcomes for peer mentors,

mentees, and institutions as a whole. What remains to be explored is the perception and expectations of students as they are choosing to become peer mentors. A greater understanding of their expectations and their perceptions can be beneficial to higher education professionals supporting peer mentoring programs.

Once higher education professionals better understand the expectations and perceptions of students deciding to become peer mentors, they can better support their peer mentors and improve their programs. The programs can see two means of improvement. The first means of improvement comes from greater understanding of the expectations of students as they initially make the decision that they want to become peer mentors. A greater understanding of the factors which attract a student to become a peer mentor can improve the efforts of higher education professionals as they recruit for their peer mentoring programs. As Newton and Ender (2000) make clear, there are a significant amount of unique peer mentoring roles throughout individual college campuses. As higher education professionals form a greater understanding of which factors influence students' perceptions and decisions to become peer mentors within their specific program, they can focus their recruitment efforts. This can lead to an increase in efficiency, quantity of interested peer mentors, and quality of interested peer mentors. The second means of improvement is through an understanding of the expectations that students form when they decide they want to become peer mentors. Understanding these expectations allows higher education professionals to tailor their training and overall program to meet those expectations. This allows the program, as a whole, to be more enjoyable for peer mentors participating within it; which can lead to a greater retention of peer mentors from year to year.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to create an understanding of the perceptions of students as they decide to become peer mentors. This study will also support the advancement of peer mentoring programs by garnering an understanding of the initial expectations of students as they enter into their peer mentoring roles. Obtaining a greater understanding of these perceptions and expectations will allow higher education professionals to better recruit and retain their student leaders.

Significance

Peer mentoring programs can help improve the quality of the collegiate experience for students within a campus community. As students transition into their new campus culture, they face a variety of challenges which can prevent them from feeling connected to campus and their peers. Students must navigate through academic challenges, social adjustments, obtaining internal motivation to set and achieve realistic goals, becoming financially literate, and getting involved and connected to the campus culture (Alarcon & Edwards, 2013, Astin, 1984, Tinto, 2001). Students who are not able to overcome these challenges during their transition are less likely to persist at their institution (Morrow & Ackermann 2012, Schlossberg, 1989, Tinto, 2001). Peer mentoring programs help to address many of the issues which cause students to prematurely leave their institution.

Concurrently, peer mentoring programs develop the skills of the student leaders who are part of the program. These student leaders gain intrapersonal skills, which help them see their impact and development throughout their peer mentoring experience (Badura, Millard, Johnson, Stewart & Bartolomei, 2003, Wawrzynski & Beverly, 2012). Peer mentors also develop leadership skills, which are beneficial for them inside and outside of their peer mentoring

experience (Harmon, 2006, Wawrzynski & Beverly, 2012). In addition, students benefit from improvements in their academic skills (Bunting et al., 2012, Colvin & Ashman, 2010, Washburn and Zevallos, 2014a). Ensuring that the peer mentor experience is a positive and beneficial one can be essential to the advancement of a peer mentoring program.

Peer mentoring programs have an overall benefit to students throughout college campuses. The improvement of peer mentoring programs can lead to an expansion of the benefits to both mentors and mentees. As the understanding of peer mentor perceptions and expectations improves, the students and programs can see growth in the quality of support they are providing to mentees.

Design

This research is quantitative, and follows the survey design method. It utilizes an instrument informed by the literature to collect data from students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The data collected consists of descriptive statistics which inform on the perceptions and expectations of college students as they become peer mentors.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

A relatively new foundation of literature exists which describes the benefits of peer mentoring programs for students and peer mentors. Through an examination of the benefits of peer mentoring programs for peer mentors and students, this review will develop a framework for examining the perceptions and expectations students have as they decide to become peer mentors. The review establishes the effectiveness of the programs and provides context for the roles that peer mentors can have within those programs. The academic, social, and leadership skills that mentors gain from participating in peer mentoring programs is then discussed.

Benefits to Mentees

When students participate as mentees in peer mentoring programs they are matched with a student who acts as a resource and support system. When engaged in a peer mentoring program, mentees are more likely to overcome the challenges they encounter during their first year. Mentees establish relationships both with their mentors and fellow mentees, which provides emotional and social support to help cope with the social adjustment to collegiate life (Harmon, 2006, Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007). Once mentees are able to establish relationships with fellow mentees, they are more likely to develop a sense of motivation to succeed in their education (Yazedjian et al., 2007).

Peer mentoring experiences not only give students support, but they create a greater overall affinity to the sponsoring institution. Mentees report a higher level of overall satisfaction with their courses in which a peer mentor is present (Washburn, 2008) and with their institution as a whole (Sanchez, Bauer, & Paronto, 2006). Their affinity to the university continues to be felt after their peer mentee experience ends (Sanchez et al., 2006).

Although many challenges exist for students during their collegiate experience, engaging in peer mentoring experiences serves as a means of increasing their likelihood of overcoming the personal, social, and academic hurdles they encounter. Mentees are able to connect to both their mentor and their fellow mentees as a source of motivation to achieve their educational goals. Peer mentoring programs provide a variety of experiences which may be beneficial to the mentees whom engage in these experiences.

Benefits to Mentors

Although peer mentoring programs are designed to benefit students who are mentees, they also produce benefits for the students who are engaged as mentors. Mentors experience social, academic, and leadership skill development. This development comes in the form of both short term and long term benefits to the mentors. These benefits inform the instrument which will be used to collect data about their initial perceptions and expectations relating to their decision to become a peer mentor.

Students engaging in a peer mentoring experience benefit socially from their role. These students have the ability to form and shape communities. Mentors see their mentees as a unique community where the mentor is the central aspect of the learning experience (Harmon, 2006). This allows peer mentors to take a large responsibility in the development of their mentees. Mentors find value in providing help to others, believing they are serving a greater societal need within their campus community (Badura et al., 2003). These student leaders see the ability to serve as a central figure who supports and uplifts their benefactors as a positive aspect of their experience (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). These skills help peer mentors develop personally as they begin to establish themselves as leaders to their fellow students.

Peer mentors view their student leadership role as an opportunity to develop friendships amongst other mentors (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Within these relationships the student leaders enjoy the opportunity to meet new individuals who are different from themselves (Badura et al., 2003). Through their role as peer mentors, they have the opportunity to develop skills which allow to them interact well with diverse groups of people (Harmon, 2006). As a result of this experience peer mentors garner a greater appreciation and awareness of diversity inside and outside of their role (Wawrzynski & Beverly, 2012). Peer mentors gain valuable social skills that help them enjoy their experience and develop within their leadership role.

Student leaders engaging in peer mentoring experiences can see growth in their own academic skills. Peer mentors learn through the challenges that their mentees face. As they observe their mentees, peer mentors reflect on their own academic behaviors and grow from having a better understanding of their own weaknesses (Bunting et al., 2012, Colvin & Ashman, 2010, Washburn and Zevallos, 2014a).

Mentors can be motivated by their mentees, and take a greater amount of responsibility for their own academic learning (Bunting et al., 2012). Mentors who guide their peers through academic work can encounter a growth within their own writing skills (Holt, 2012, Washburn and Zevallos, 2014b). As role models, peer mentors become more familiar with policies of academic integrity which help them when completing their own work (Holt & Lopez, 2014).

As their mentees learn valuable time management skills, the mentor advances their ability to manage and organize their own schedule (Harmon, 2006, Holt & Lopez, 2014). Mentors start to see themselves as facilitating the learning process, allowing them to see academia from the instructor's perspective (Holt & Lopez, 2014). This allows them to approach their own academic work with a holistic mentality.

Peer mentors develop leadership skills while serving in their roles. These students serve as a specific type of role model: one who must properly model how to successfully adjust to all aspects of collegiate life (Badura et. al. 2003, Harmon, 2006). Peer mentors also begin to develop their decision making skills (Badura et al., 2003). Within their established community, mentors are able to identify the individual needs and strengths of their students (Harmon 2006). These mentors, then, start to see themselves as a critical part of their mentees' lives; providing value to the time they are investing in their leadership position. As leaders of their peers, students gain higher-order thinking skills (Wawrzynski & Beverly, 2012) allowing them to make their experience applicable outside of their peer mentoring role. Peer mentors can use their experience as a catalyst for discovering which career they would like pursue (Harmon, 2006). Further personal growth occurs within peer mentors as they witness the process of student development and the qualities which they possess as agents of that development (Bunting et al., 2012). As their mentees grow through their collegiate experience, the peer mentor sees themselves grow personally; in terms of self-worth, leadership ability, and tangible skills which benefit them both inside and outside of their peer mentoring experience.

The high level of individual and group communication required within peer mentoring roles results in mentors improving their presentation and communication skills (Harmon, 2006, Wawrzynski & Beverly, 2012). Peer mentors are able to establish beneficial relationships not only with their mentees and fellow peers but also with the staff members coordinating their program. They are likely to work with at least one staff member who will help to foster their development and assist the peer mentor in translating their new skills beyond the leadership position (Badura et al., 2003, Holt, 2012). As they engage further in their role, they are likely to be exposed to influential staff members throughout their institution which can facilitate positive

networking experiences for them (Kenedy, Monty, & Lambert-Drache, 2012). They establish a network of professionals who connect them to resources which allow them to be successful in their endeavors after their leadership experience ends.

Summary

Peer mentoring programs serve the important role of supporting mentees as they encounter the many challenges that come throughout a collegiate experience. Peer mentoring programs help student leaders to gain valuable leadership, academic, and social skills which allow them to perform better within their role as well as in their own academic and life pursuits. This research aims to gain an understanding of the perceptions of college students as they choose to become peer mentors and what expectations they bring with them to their experience.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

This research study utilized a quantitative approach to answer the research questions. Two research questions guide the study and allow for a holistic understanding of the perceptions and expectations of peer mentors:

1. What factors attract college students to become peer mentors?

2. What can higher education professionals do to improve their peer mentor recruiting and retention practices?

Research Design

This study used the survey design method. This method was chosen because it allowed a generalization from the sample to population, so that inferences could be drawn about the population as a whole (Creswell, 2015). This method was chosen, in particular, because it allowed the researcher to collect data quickly, and from a variety of different peer mentoring groups. The survey was longitudinal, as data was collected over a 6 day period. Data was collected through an electronic survey, which participants could access through a computer or through their mobile electronic device.

Data Collection

The survey (Appendix A) was distributed electronically through a link sent to potential participants via e-mail. Participants within this study included students who fulfilled the established definition of peer mentoring or had served in the defined peer mentoring role within the last academic year (August 2015-July 2016). The definition of peer mentoring within this study was: when a student serves as a leader amongst their peers within an institutionally supported program which facilitates a relationship amongst peers where one student is providing

support for at least one peer. The participants in this study were limited to students enrolled at University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The survey was distributed to student leaders throughout the university including students who serve or have served as: Center for Leadership & Service Ignite Team Leaders, Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentors, Center for International Education Peer Mentors, Center for Career Development Peer Career Counselors, Haslam College of Business BUAD 100 Peer Mentors, Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentors, Office of Multicultural Student Life Multicultural Mentors, Office of Orientation & Transition Orientation Leaders, Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentors, University Housing Living and Learning Community Mentors, University Housing Resident Assistants, University Housing Residential Halls Council Executive members, and the Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentors.

This survey gathered descriptive statistics. Previous literature suggested that the following factors are benefits which attract students to become peer mentors: the desire to provide help to fellow students, establish a greater sense of self-worth, gain leadership skills, gain an understanding of what career they would like to pursue, improve their decision making skills, improve their time management skills, improve their ability to organize themselves, enhance your communication skills, improve their own academic skills, establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors, establish a professional network with staff, gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity, and work with a diverse group of individuals. Participants were asked to gauge how influential each of these factors were during their initial decision making process to decide to become a peer mentor. The survey utilized a Likert scale of 1-10 where participants indicated how influential each factor was for them as they were deciding

to become peer mentors. Participants were then given the opportunity to provide additional factors which they felt were influential to their decision to become a peer mentor.

Participants were asked to indicate their peer mentoring role in the survey. If a student was involved in multiple peer mentoring roles they were asked to identify a primary role, which was the peer mentoring role they engaged with most recently. The participants were also asked to identify additional peer mentoring roles they were currently engaged with or had engaged with in the past. This allowed for the participants to give the most accurate and relevant responses, while still providing context for their overall engagement in peer mentoring roles. Quantitative data collection began January 29th, 2017 and ended on February 3rd, 2017.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results were analyzed based on the responses from the Likert scale and results indicated the level of influence each factor had upon the participants as a whole. Influence levels were compared amongst racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and class level. The analysis included the level of influence for each factor, compared to each peer mentoring group which participated in this study. This allowed for the data to yield results to suggest which factors which were consistently more influential or less influential amongst all peer mentoring roles. This also allowed for the data to yield results which suggested which factors were more influential amongst specific peer mentoring roles. Additionally, the data allowed for an understanding of how race/ethnicity, gender, and class level affected the level of influence factors have in a college students' decision to become a peer mentor.

Ethical Considerations

This study collected data from students throughout various programs on campus. It included asking students to provide information which could relate to their current experiences or individuals they interacted with consistently. This study followed guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board, primarily to reduce risk for participant and to do no harm. The study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board. Quantitative data collected through surveys was confidential and was not identifiable to individual participants. An informed consent document was received from every participant before they could begin participating in the survey. The informed consent was obtained electronically and is directly linked to each participants' responses.

Limitations and Delimitations

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville is a public, large, land grant, flag-ship University and therefore, does not represent all institution types. The collection of data was limited by the peer mentors who are willing to participate in the study. Survey fatigue served as a limitation to the data collection within this study. The collection of data was limited by the willingness of peer mentor supervisors to forward the request to participate in the study to their peer mentors.

There are several delimitations within the study. First, is the choice of using peer mentors who had already made the decision to become a peer mentor. This limited the data, as it asked peer mentors to reflect back on their experience, rather than answering in the process of deciding. This choice was made by the researcher to increase the potential amount of data which could be collected. Access to peer mentors and their willingness to participate in the study may have been limited if the collection occurred during their initial decision making process. There were peer mentors who participated in this study who have had more than one peer mentoring

role. In this case, the researcher chose to indicate that the peer mentor complete the survey in terms of the most recent position that they had decided to take on. The peer mentor also provided information on the other peer mentoring roles which they have served in or are currently serving in. This allowed for the peer mentor to provide information which is the most accurate.

Validity of Study

The survey method design included potential internal and external threats. Internal threats for this study included: maturation, and selection. Maturation, according to Creswell (2015) is the threat of participants in an experiment changing over the time over the study. This threat was offset by only allowing data to be collected over 6 days, assuring that the experience of peer mentors did not change during data collection. Selection, according to Creswell (2015) is the threat of participants being selected who have characteristics which may lead them to a specific outcome. This survey assured that all peer mentors within participating roles had the ability to take part in the survey, to offset this risk. The external risk to this study was interaction of selection and treatment. Creswell (2015) stated that this threat stops the researcher from generalizing results to individuals who do not have the characteristics of the participants within the study. In response to this threat, the research did not make inferences beyond the peer mentoring groups which participated in this study.

Postionality

I have been involved with peer mentoring in multiple capacities. As an undergraduate student, I served in multiple peer mentoring roles outside of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. As a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, I support the First-Year Studies 101 Peer Mentors and the Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentors. Both the First-Year Studies 101 Peer Mentors and the Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentors, however, have direct

supervisors which are professional staff members at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I ensured that any request to participate in the study came directly from these staff members, and that it was made clear that participation was not required, and refusal to participate would not lead to any negative consequences. I have engaged in this research as a means of expanding my knowledge of programming with peer mentors. I believe in the ability of these students to positively impact campus communities and anticipate continuing to work with similar student populations in future positions.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to create an understanding of the perceptions and expectations of college students as they make the decision to become peer mentors. A quantitative instrument was designed to measure thirteen factors which previous literature suggested as benefits students may receive as a result of engaging in peer mentoring roles on college campuses. The factors measured in this study were presented in the survey as: helping fellow students, establishing a greater sense of self-worth, gain leadership skills, gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue, improve your decision making skills, improve your time management skills, improving your ability to organize yourself, enhance your communication skills, improve your academic skills, establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors, establish meaningful relationships with university staff members, gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity, and work with a group of diverse individuals.

This chapter will first describe the demographics of the study and provide an overview of the influence that each factor had on the total population. An analysis of how each peer mentoring role was influenced will follow. The chapter will then analyze how racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and class level influenced each factor within the study, compared to the overall influence of each factor. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the additional factors which participants indicated were influential to their decision to become a peer mentor.

Demographic Information

The survey was distributed to 664 student leaders at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. A total of 110 student leaders participated in the study, resulting in a 16.6 % response

rate. A total of 13 student leadership groups, representing a variety of missions and values, were invited to participate in the study. Of those, 11 groups participated in the study, including: Center for Leadership & Service Team Leader, Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentors, Center for Career Development Peer Career Counselor, Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentor, Office of Multicultural Student Life Multicultural Mentor, Office of Orientation & Transition Orientation Leader, Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentor, University Housing Living and Learning Community Mentor, University Housing Resident Assistant, University Housing Residential Halls Council Executive Member, and Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentor. Demographic information was collected regarding racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and class level.

Table 1. (Appendix B) shows that Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentors, Office of First-Year Studies 101 Peer Mentors, University Housing Resident Assistants, and Center for Leadership and Service Team Leaders were the largest peer mentoring roles to participate in the study. Other roles, such as: Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentors and the University Housing Living and Learning Community Mentors had a high response rate, despite not having a large quantity of peer mentors.

Influence of Factors for Overall Population

Table 2. (Appendix C) displays the mean and mode for each factor influencing a student's decision to become a peer mentor. The participants responded to the level of influence individual factors had on their decision to become a peer mentor utilizing a Likert scale ranging from 1-10. For this study, a 1 indicated that the factor was not influential on the students' decision to become a peer mentor, a 5 indicated that the factor was moderately influential, and 10 indicated that the factor was very influential. All 110 participants responded to each factor.

Helping fellow students (10), gain leadership skills (10), improve your ability to organize yourself skills (10), enhance your communication skills (10), establish meaningful relationships with university staff (10), establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors (10), gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity (10), and opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals (10) were the highest modes for this study. Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue (1) was the lowest mode in this study.

The standard deviation for the factors featured in Table 2. (Appendix C) range from 1.53 to 3.1. These standard deviations all indicated that there was variability within the results of the study. Standard deviation is included in Table 2. (Appendix C) because of the large sample size. Given the variability, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 1. (Appendix D) shows the differences in mean scores for each factor influencing college students' decisions to become peer mentors. Helping fellow students ($m = 8.77$), gain leadership skills ($m = 8.36$), enhance your communication skills ($m = 8.15$), and opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals were the most influential factors which attract students to decide to become peer mentors. Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue ($m = 5.40$), improve your academic skills ($m = 5.44$), improve your decision making skills ($m = 6.36$), and improve your time management skills ($m = 6.40$) were the least influential factors which attracted students to decide to become peer mentors.

Analysis of Influence by Peer Mentoring Role

Table 3 (Appendix E) displays the mean level of influence for all factors by each peer mentoring role. The Center for Leadership and Service Team Leaders were most influenced by: helping fellow students ($m = 9.46$) and the opportunity to work with a diverse group of individuals ($m = 9.31$). The Center for Leadership and Service Team Leaders were least

influenced by: gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue ($m = 5.15$) and improve your academic skills ($m = 5.23$). The Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentors were most influenced by: helping fellow students ($m = 8.56$) and establish meaningful relationships with university staff ($m = 8.06$). The Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentors were least influenced by: gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue ($m = 4.78$), improve your decision making skills ($m = 5.61$), and improve your academic skills ($m = 5.61$). The Office of Orientation & Transition Orientation Leaders were most influenced by: helping fellow students ($m = 9.25$) and the opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals ($m = 9.25$). The Office of Orientation & Transition Orientation Leaders were least influenced by: improve your academic skills ($m = 5.75$) and improve your ability to organize yourself skills ($m = 6.17$).

The Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentors were most influenced by gain leadership skills ($m = 8.57$) and helping fellow students ($m = 8.57$). The Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentors were least influenced by gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue ($m = 6.14$) and improve time management ($m = 6.57$). The Office of Multicultural Student Life Multicultural Mentors were most influenced by: helping fellow students ($m = 8.89$) and establish a greater sense of self-worth ($m = 8.22$). The Office of Multicultural Student Life Multicultural Mentors were least influenced by: improve your academic skills ($m = 4.22$) and improve your decision making skills ($m = 5.78$). The Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentors were most influenced by: helping fellow students ($m = 8.75$) and gain leadership skills ($m = 7.75$). The Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentors were least influenced by gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue ($m = 4.05$) and improve your decision making skills ($m = 5.05$).

The Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentors were most influenced by: gain leadership skills ($m = 8.91$) and establish meaningful relationships with

fellow peers ($m = 8.55$). The Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentors were least influenced by: improve your ability to organize yourself skills ($m = 6.82$) and improve your time management skills ($m = 7.82$). The University Housing Resident Assistants were most influenced by: enhance your communication skills ($m = 8.62$) and helping fellow students ($m = 8.62$). The University Housing Resident Assistants were least influenced by: gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue ($m = 5.23$) and improve your decision making skills ($m = 7.0$).

Analysis of Influence by Race/Ethnicity

Table 4. (Appendix F) shows the racial/ethnic identity of participants. The largest demographic for this study was students who identity as white. Peer mentors who identify as white were 68.2% of the student leaders who participated in the study. This was lower than the total population of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville which was 78.9% students who identified as white. Students who identified as Black or African American account for 21.8% of this study, compared to 6.8% of the total population of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Students who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a account for 2.7% of this study, compared to 3.5% of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville total population. Students who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native account for 0.9% of this study, compared to 0.3% of the total population of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Table 5. (Appendix G) compares level of influence for factors by racial/ethnic identity of participants. Students who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Other were omitted from the results, to protect the identity of those participants. Students who identified as Black or African American (n=24) were most influenced by the factor: helping fellow students ($m = 8.71$). The next most influential factors for students

who identified as Black or African American were: enhance your communication skills *(m =* 8.58), and gain leadership skills *(m = 8.50)*. The least influential factor for students who identified as Black or African American was: improve your academic skills *(m = 4.96)*.

Students who identified as White were most influenced by the factor: helping fellow students *(m = 8.73)*. Students who identified as White were next most influenced by the factors: gain leadership skills *(m = 8.35)* and enhance your communication skills *(m = 8.09)*. Students who identified as white were least influenced by the factor: gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue path *(m = 5.23)*.

Figure 2. (Appendix H) compares the mean response of each factor of influence by racial/ethnic identify of participants to the overall mean for each factor. Students who identified as Asian *(n=4)* were more influenced than the overall population of this study for all thirteen factors of influence. Students who identified as Asian *(n=4)* were more influenced than the other racial/ethnic identities within this study for all factors except: gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue path *(m = 6.25)*.

Students who identified as White *(n=75)* were less influenced than the overall population of this study for all factors except: improve your academic skills *(m = 5.53)* and establish meaningful relationships with university staff members *(m = 7.72)*.

Analysis of Influence by Gender

Table 6. (Appendix I) shows the gender identity of participants in this study. Students who identified as female account for 80% of participants in this study, compared to 50% of the total population of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Students who identified as male account for 19.1% of participants in this study, compared to 50% of the total population of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Table 7. (Appendix J) compares level of influence for all factors to the gender identity of participants. Students who identified as female were most influenced by the factor: helping fellow students ($m = 8.92$). Students who identified as female were next most influenced by the following factors: gain leadership skills ($m = 8.45$), enhance your communication skills ($m = 8.14$), and opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals ($m = 7.90$).

Students who identified as male were most influenced by the factor: helping fellow students ($m = 8.48$). Students who identified as male were next most influenced by: enhance your communication skills ($m = 8.33$), gain leadership skills ($m = 8.24$), and opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals ($m = 7.95$).

Figure 3. (Appendix K) compares the mean of each factor of influence by gender identify of participants to the overall mean for each factor. Students who identified as female were more influenced than the overall population for the following factors: helping fellow students ($m = 8.92$), establishing a greater sense of self-worth ($m = 7.24$), gain leadership skills ($m = 8.45$), gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue ($m = 5.44$), establish meaningful relationships with university staff ($m = 7.74$), and opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals ($m = 7.90$).

Students who identified as male were more influenced that the overall population for all of the factors within this study except: helping fellow students ($m = 8.77$) and gain leadership skills ($m = 8.24$).

Analysis of Influence by Class Level

Table 8. (Appendix L) shows the class level of participants in this study. Juniors represented 40% of the population of this study, compared to 17.3% of the total population of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2015). Sophomore

students were 34.6% of the population of this study, compared to 16.8% of the total population of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2015). Seniors were 24.5% of the participants within this study, compared to 21.9% of the total population of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2015).

Table 9. (Appendix M) compares mean level of influence for all factors to class level of participants. Sophomore students were most influenced by the factor: establish meaningful relationships with university staff (*m* = 8.84). Sophomore students were also influenced by the factors: helping fellow students (*m* = 8.82) and enhance your communication skills (*m* = 8.58). Sophomore students were influenced the least by the factor: improve your academic skills (*m* = 5.63).

Junior students were most influenced by the factor: helping fellow students (*m* = 8.82). Junior students were next most influenced by: gain leadership skills (*m* = 8.43) and enhance your communication skills (*m* = 8.14). Junior students were least influenced by the factor: improve your academic skills (*m* = 5.43).

Senior students were most influenced by the factor: helping fellow students (*m* = 8.78). Senior students were also influenced by: establish a greater sense of self-worth (*m* = 7.67) and enhance your communication skills (*m* = 7.67). Senior students were least influenced by: gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue path (*m* = 4.63).

Figure 4. (Appendix N) compares the mean of each factor of influence by class level of participants to the overall mean for each factor. Sophomore students were more influenced than the overall population for all thirteen factors within this study. Sophomore students were more influenced than either junior or senior students for all factors except: establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors (*m* = 7.84), establish meaningful relationships with

university staff (*m* = 7.82), and opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals (*m* = 7.79).

Junior students were more influenced than the overall population for the following factors: gain leadership skills (*m* = 8.43), gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue (*m* = 5.50), improve your decision making skills (*m* = 6.59), establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors (*m* = 8.05), establish meaningful relationships with university staff (*m* = 7.95), gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity (*m* = 7.36), and opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals (*m* = 8.09).

Senior students were less influenced than the overall population for all factors except: helping fellow students (*m* = 8.78) and establish a greater sense of self-worth (*m* = 7.67). For the remaining 11 factors, senior students were less influenced than both sophomore and junior students.

Analysis of Additional Factors of Influence

In addition to the quantitative questions asked in the survey, a qualitative question was included to allow participants an opportunity to list additional factors that influenced their decision to become a peer mentor. In total, 34 responses were collected through this question. Several trends occurred within these responses, including: upholding The Volunteer Spirit by contributing to the overall campus community of the University of Tennessee, giving back to others the positive mentoring experience they had, giving students a mentor which they wish they would have had, and using the peer mentoring role as an opportunity to develop themselves.

Participants displayed a desire to give back to the university community as a whole, in total seven responses indicated that they wanted to be a part of what one student called "The VOLunteer experience." Another student described that they "needed to make a difference, even

in one resident's life". Another student described their desire to make an impact in the following way:

> I love working with and being able to make an impact on other students around campus. The relationships I have made with my residents make the job totally worthwhile.

Students described having a positive experience as a mentee, and how their experiences influenced them to become a mentor. Four students responded in this way. They felt the need to "give back to the University of Tennessee". One student described the desire to give back as:

> Wanting to give back to a program that gave so much to me. More than I could have ever asked for.

Participants also described the lack of mentorship they had experienced at the University of Tennessee. Three students responded by expressing that they wanted to use their peer mentoring role as a platform for helping students overcome the challenges they had faced. A peer mentor described this as:

> I wanted to increase my involvement here at the university and be a mentor to an incoming freshman, which is something that I did not have when I came up here in the fall of 2016.

Another participant mentioned the potential of helping students academically:

> I wanted to be able to mentor incoming pre-medicine students so that their academic journey would be easier.

Peer mentors described the potential they saw to improve themselves as individuals and as leaders in their role. Of the five peer mentors that noted this, one student described this as "a

great experience for me to grow as an individual" another student gave this explanation for becoming a peer mentor:

> I believe everyone has room to grow as a leader and the opportunities at UT are
>
> endless. Taking advantage of the roles I have had and currently have here was
>
> definitely a top priority of mine as I hope to influence students around me and
>
> also grow as a young man.

Summary

The results of this study indicated that students were influenced at different levels by the 13 factors within the study when considered by: peer mentoring role, racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and class level. Additionally, there were multiple trends found when students were given the opportunity to qualitatively respond to additional factors which influenced their decision to become a peer mentor. The next chapter will discuss how the results from this section relate to the research questions, and how higher education professionals can be informed by the analysis within this section.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of students as they decide to become peer mentors. This study also sought to support the advancement of peer mentoring programs by garnering an understanding of the initial expectations of students as they entered into their peer mentoring roles. Obtaining a greater understanding of these perceptions and expectations may allow higher education professionals to better recruit and retain their student leaders.

A quantitative instrument was designed featuring thirteen factors, which previous literature suggested were benefits of college students engaging in peer mentoring roles. The instrument used a Likert scale of 1-10 to measure how influential students perceived a factor to have been on their decision to become a peer mentor. On this scale, 1 was not influential and 10 was very influential, 5 denoted moderate influence. A total of 110 peer mentors at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville participated in the survey, over a period of 6 days. The participants represented 11 different peer mentoring roles.

This study was guided by two research questions.

1. What factors attract college students to become peer mentors?
2. What can higher education professionals do to improve their peer mentor recruiting and retention practices?

This chapter includes a summary of the study, conclusions, limitations, recommendations for higher education professionals, and potential directions for further research. An overview of findings follows, which links the questions with results and existing literature.

Overview of Findings

1. What factors attract college students to become peer mentors?

The influence of thirteen factors was measured within this study. The thirteen factors measured were: helping fellow students, establish a greater sense of self-worth, gain leadership skills, gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue, improve your decision making skills, improve your time management skills, improve your ability to organize yourself, enhance your communication skills, improve your academic skills, establish meaningful relationships with other peer mentors, establish meaningful relationships with university staff, gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity and opportunity to work with a diverse group of individuals. The factors will be discussed from most influential, to least influential.

Three factors stood out as very influential within the study. These factors all had mean influences above 8.00. The most influential factor for this study was helping fellow students ($m = 8.77$). The factor helping fellow students aligned with the findings of Badura et al. (2003) who suggested that mentors find value in providing help to others. This factor had a mode of 10, with 51 participants responding that it was very influential to their decision to become a peer mentor. Gain leadership skills ($m = 8.36$) was the factor with the second highest influence. This factor aligned with the conclusions of Badura et. al (2003) and Harmon (2006) who stated that peer mentors acted as proper role models of how to successfully transition into college. Harmon (2006) also stated that peer mentors were able to identify the individual strengths and needs of their community. This factor had a mode of 10 within the study, 36 participants indicated that this factor was very influential to their decision to become a peer mentor. Enhance your communication skills ($m = 8.15$) was the third most influential factor. This factor aligned with the findings of Harmon (2006) and Wawrzynski and Beverly (2012) indicated that the high level

of individual and group communication required of peer mentors lead to an improvement of presentation and communication skills. This factor had a mode of 10; 34 peer mentors indicated that the factor was very influential on their decision to become a peer mentor. Although these three factors yielded high mean levels of influence, the standard deviations were high and suggest variability amongst the results

Several factors had mean influences which suggested a moderate level of influence. Improve your ability to organize yourself ($m = 6.55$) aligned with the findings of Harmon (2006) and Holt and Lopez (2014), who noted that as mentors facilitated growth within their mentees' ability to organize themselves, the peer mentor saw growth within the own organization skills. The mode for this factor was 9, and 18 participants responded with one of these two options. Improve your time management skills ($m = 6.40$) was the next least influential factor. This factor aligned with Holt and Lopez (2014), who suggested that peer mentors learned valuable time management skills as they engage with their leadership experience. This factor had a mode of 8, this was the response from 21 peer mentors. Improve your decision making skills ($m = 6.36$) was the third least influential factor. This factor aligned with the findings of Badura et. al (2003) who stated that peer mentors had the ability to develop this skills as they engaged with their leadership role. The mode for this factor was 8.5; with 17 responses from participants. Improve your academic skills ($m = 5.44$) was the second least influential factor within this study. This factor aligned with the findings of Bunting et al. (2012) who noted that peer mentors could become motivated by their peers and take a greater responsibility for their own academic learning. Additionally Holt (2012) and Washburn and Zevallos (2014b) state that peer mentors could encounter growth within their own writing skills. The mode for improve academic skills was 5, 18 participants indicated that this factor was moderately influential to their decision to

become a peer mentor. Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue ($m = 5.40$) was the least influential factor for college students choosing to become peer mentors. This factor aligned with the findings of Harmon (2006) who noted that peer mentoring experiences could be a catalyst for helping students discover what career they would like to pursue. The mode for this factor was 1, 18 peer mentors indicated that the factor gain an understanding of potential career path had no influence on their decision to become a peer mentor. These factors did yield moderate levels of influence, however, the moderate to high standard deviations indicated variability amongst the results.

In addition, participants were given the opportunity to indicate factors which they believed to be influential, but were not present in the quantitative instrument. A few consistent themes emerged. Students indicated having a desire to give back to their university community as a whole. Additionally, students described a desire to give back to a mentoring program which they benefitted from as a mentee. In contrast, other students described the lack of mentorship they received, and sought to provide that for others. Students also believed that there was an ability to grow holistically within their peer mentoring role.

2. **What can higher education professionals do to improve their peer mentor recruiting and retention practices?**

Within the study, differences emerged from the varying peer mentoring roles. Additionally, differences were found amongst racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and the class level of peer mentors. Newton and Ender (2000) noted that peer mentoring roles on college campuses vary drastically based on their mission and structure. The following section uses Newton and Ender (2000) as a foundation, and suggests that these peer mentoring roles also vary in terms of the factors which influence students to take part in them.

The various peer mentoring roles were most influenced uniquely within this study. Helping fellow students was the most influential for: Center for Leadership & Service Team Leader ($m = 9.46$) Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentor ($m = 8.56$), Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentor ($m = 8.57$), Office of Multicultural Student Life Multicultural Mentor ($m = 8.89$), Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentor ($m = 8.75$), and University Housing Residential Halls Council Executive Member ($m = 10.00$). Gain leadership skills was the most influential factor for: Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentor ($m = 8.91$), Center for Career Development Peer Career Counselor ($m = 7.50$), and University Housing Residential Halls Council Executive Member ($m = 10.00$). Enhance your communication skills was the most influential factor for: University Housing Living and Learning Community Mentor ($m = 8.00$) and University Housing Resident Assistant ($m = 8.62$). Opportunity to work with a diverse group of individuals was the most influential factor for: Office of Orientation & Transition Orientation Leader ($m = 9.25$). Improve your decision making skills was least influential factor for: Center for Career Development Peer Career Counselors ($m = 4.50$). Improve academic skills was the least influential factor for: Office of Orientation & Transition Leader ($m = 5.75$), Office of Multicultural Student Life Multicultural Mentor ($m = 4.22$), and Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentor ($m = 5.36$). Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue is the least influential factor for: Center for Leadership & Service Team Leader ($m = 5.15$), Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentors ($m = 4.78$), Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentor ($m = 6.14$), Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentor ($m = 4.05$), University Housing Living and Learning Community Mentor ($m = 3.00$) and University Housing Resident Assistant ($m = 5.23$).

Mean levels of influence also varied, depending on the racial/ethnic identity of the peer mentor. Enhance your communication skills ($m = 9.75$), gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity ($m = 9.75$), and opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals ($m = 9.75$) were the most influential factors for students who identified as Asian. Helping fellow students was the most influential factor for students who identified as: Black or African American ($m = 8.71$), Hispanic or Latino/a ($m = 8.33$), and White ($m = 8.73$). Improve your academic skills was the least influential factor for students who identified as: African American or Black ($m = 4.96$) and Hispanic or Latino/a ($m = 4.00$). Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue was the least influential factor for students who identified as: Asian ($m = 6.25$) and White ($m = 5.23$).

Level of influence varied, as well, when considering the gender identity and class level of peer mentors. Helping fellow students was the most influential factor for students who identified as female ($m = 8.92$) and male ($m = 8.48$). Gain leadership skills was the most influential factor for sophomore students ($m = 8.84$). Helping fellow students was the most influential factor for junior students ($m = 8.75$) and senior students ($m = 8.78$).

Summary Findings

1. Peer mentors perceived that the factors: helping fellow students, gain leadership skills, and enhance your communication skills were very influential to their decision to become a peer mentor.

2. Peer mentors perceived that the factors: gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue, improve your academic skills, and improve your decision making skills were moderately influential to their decision to become a peer mentor.

3. Peer mentors perceived that they were at least moderately influenced by all thirteen factors within this study.

4. The racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and class level of peer mentors affected the level of influence peer mentors perceived for some factors.

5. Peer mentors expected to give back to their campus community and provide mentorship to students, while also developing personally from their leadership experience.

Summary Discussion

The results of this study indicated that peer mentors perceived all thirteen factors to be at least moderately influential on their decision to become a peer mentor. These findings were consistent with the existing literature (Badura et al., 2003, Bunting et al., Colvin & Ashman, 2010, Harmon 2006, Holt, 2012, Holt & Lopez, 2014, Kenedy et. al., 2012, Washburn and Zevallos, 2014b, and Wawrzynski & Beverly, 2012).

Previous literature did not account for the themes found within the open-ended section of the study. The themes included: the opportunity to give back to the university community as a whole, the opportunity to give back to a program which the mentor directly benefitted from, and the opportunity to provide a more positive experience to mentees than the mentor had experienced themselves.

Although all thirteen factors were perceived to be at least moderately influential by peer mentors, there was a difference between the mean influences of factors, relative to each other. Additionally, the standard deviation amongst factors indicated a large variance within the results. This suggests that the findings of this research study is not entirely consistent with previous literature.

Helping fellow students (Badura et al., 2003), gain leadership skills (Badura et. al., 2003, & Harmon, 2006), and enhance your communication skills (Harmon, 2006, Wawrzynski & Beverly, 2012) had a mean influence between 8.00 and 9.00. This suggested that these factors were perceived as being very influential to college students choosing to become peer mentors

Improve your ability to organize yourself (Harmon, 2006, Holt & Lopez, 2014), improve your time management skills (Holt & Lopez, 2014), and improve your decision making skills (Badura et al., 2003) had a mean influence between 6.00 and 7.00. This suggested that although these factors were perceived as above moderate influence, they still are not perceived by peer mentors as being as influential on their decision to become a student leader. Improve your academic skills (Bunting et al., 2012, Holt, 2012, Washburn & Zevallos, 2014b), and gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue (Harmon, 2006) had a mean between 5.00 and 6.00. This suggested that these factors are perceived by peer mentors as having just above a moderate influence on their decision to become a peer mentor. These factors were perceived the lowest amongst all factors within this study.

Recommendations for Practice

Higher education professionals who work with student leaders dedicate a significant amount of effort into their peer mentor recruiting efforts. These professionals may benefit from focusing their peer mentor recruitment on any of the thirteen factors within this study, as it was found that all factors were perceived by college students to be at least moderately influential on their decision to become a peer mentor. The following recommendations may help higher education professionals make their recruitment efforts more effective and efficient.

1. Higher education professionals could benefit from creating a common marketing strategy for peer mentor recruitment campaigns. Professionals often exert a significant amount of time

and energy into developing recruitment campaigns for their specific peer mentoring roles. These professionals often rely on similar marketing tools such as: social media, tabling, and visiting student clubs and organizations. The results of this study, however, indicated that a common marketing strategy could be effectively used by featuring the three factors which were found to be very influential to peer mentors in aggregate: helping fellow students, gain leadership skills, and enhance your communication skills. These factors can be marketed as overall themes to the benefits of becoming a peer mentor, in general, at an institution. In addition, individual professionals could then have the opportunity to create supplemental marketing materials which would display the factors which were found to be more influential to the peer mentoring role they sponsor. This could include any of the other ten factors within the study. This would allow professionals to reallocate their effort to ensuring the quality of their program matches the perception that peer mentors have of the position.

2. When promoting their peer mentoring position, higher education professionals could benefit from promoting directly to mentees within their program. Students mentioned the desire to give back to a program from which they personally benefitted. Higher education professionals can exert less energy into marketing the benefits of the position, since these students are already familiar with the sponsored program. This also provides higher education professionals with a captive audience, to which they could directly recruit from.

3. Higher education professionals could benefit from establishing a common recruiting timeline within their institution. Recruiting timelines for peer mentors are often staggered on a campus, so that higher education professionals can market to potential peer mentors without confusing their message with other peer mentoring roles. This can affect the quality of sequential events that professionals sponsor. For example, a professional may choose to

recruit their peer mentors early in the spring semester, instead of the fall semester, so that

they can implement a recruiting campaign which does not overlap with the majority of the

other peer mentoring roles at their institution. This, however, then makes it so that

professional cannot sponsor a semester long training for their peer mentors. This could make

it more difficult for the professional to provide a training program which gives the mentors

all of the benefits they perceived they would get from the position.

The results of this study suggested, however, that the most and least influential factors for

college students choosing to become peer mentors varied based on peer mentoring role. The

benefit that a peer mentor desires to get out of their leadership role, then, may be more important

to their decision to become a peer mentor than the timing of when they are recruited.

Implementing a common recruiting timeline could allow for potential peer mentors to evaluate

all of the peer mentoring roles offered at their institution at once. The student, then, can decide

on the role they wish to take on based on what they desire to get out of their peer mentoring

experience.

4. Peer mentoring teams benefit from having diverse student leaders. These individuals bring

unique perspectives and strengths which help create well-rounded teams. Additionally, both

previous literature and peer mentors within this study indicated that the opportunity to work with

a group of diverse individuals was a factor which influenced their decision to become a peer

mentor. Recruiting diverse teams, however, can be challenging for higher education

professionals, especially at institutions where the majority of the student body is homogenous in

terms of race or gender. The results of this study indicate that the level of influence that students

perceived factors to have on their decision to become a peer mentor may vary based on their

racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and class level. Higher education professionals who are

struggling to recruit diverse students could consider adjusting their marketing strategies to highlight the factors which were perceived as more influential to the racial/ethnic identities or gender identities which they are struggling to recruit. This same strategy could be applied to higher education professionals who are struggling to recruit students which represent specific class levels.

Directions for Further Research

This study was an effort to inform the recruitment and retention practices of higher education professionals coordinating peer mentoring programs. Multiple directions for future research exist, taking into consideration both the results and limitations of the study.

The most apparent limitation of this study was the limited scope of the participants. This study included several peer mentoring roles at one institution; the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. This leaves multiple options for expanding the scope of the study. First, the scope can be expanded by incorporating all peer mentoring groups at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The peer mentoring roles selected for this study were an attempt to represent various leadership roles across campus, however, it did not include every group. Second, the scope of this study could be expanded to include peer mentoring roles from multiple institutions. Institutions of higher education often have unique campus cultures, by expanding this study to multiple institutions and institutional types, the research could be expanded to better represent peer mentoring within higher education as a whole.

Another limitation of this study is the sample size. The results of this research are from 110 peer mentors who agreed to participate. This sample size is a small fraction of the overall population of peer mentors within higher education. Additionally, the small sample size affected the ability to analyze the data by racial/ethnic identity; as multiple identities were not included in

the study due to lack of participation. In particular, the lack of representation of male students in peer mentoring roles, compared to the overall male population of the University was apparent. Further research could specifically target the perceptions of male college students who choose to become peer mentors, with the intent to analyze why these students are underrepresented in the peer mentor population. An expansion of the study to other institutions could help to improve the sample size, and strengthen the results of this study.

The timing of the study serves as a significant limitation to the results of the study. The peer mentors who engaged with the study were doing so after serving in the peer mentoring role. This, compared to participating in the study while they were going through recruitment, may skew their responses. Their perceptions may be skewed by the experience that they have had. Additionally, this limits participants only to college students who were selected as peer mentors, rather than considering both the peer mentors who were selected and the college students who were not. Future research may benefit from focusing on exploring if there is a difference between these two populations.

Conclusion

This study found that thirteen factors were at least moderately influential to college students as they chose to become peer mentors at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The level of influence for each factor, however, varied based on peer mentoring role, racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and class level. It could be beneficial for higher education professionals to utilize the factors which were most influential in aggregate to form common recruitment timelines and marketing strategies. Additionally, higher education professionals could utilize the results of the study to recruit more diverse peer mentors. The professionals could also benefit from marketing directly to the mentees within program they sponsor. Peer mentoring programs

are critical to providing the social, academic, and peer support which help mentees succeed on college campuses. Peer mentoring programs, however, also provide mentors with the ability to develop their academic, leadership, and social skills. This study provides higher education professionals with recommendations which could help them design more efficient and effective recruitment campaigns. This would allow higher education professionals to focus, instead, on sponsoring peer mentoring programs which provide the mentors with a high quality experience. This could allow for peer mentoring programs to grow in size and quality, improving the experience for both mentees and mentors.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Quantitative Peer Mentor Survey

To be administered through Google Forms

<u>Before Starting the Survey</u>

Thank you for participating in this study. Your participation will be kept confidential and your answers will not be personally identifiable. This survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Below, please indicate that you understand this before beginning the survey.

        a. Yes, I understand and give informed consent to participating in this study

1. Please indicate all peer mentoring role(s) you have held at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville

    a. Center for Leadership & Service Team Leader
    b. Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentor
    c. Center for International Education Peer Mentor
    d. Center for Career Development Peer Career Counselor
    e. Haslam College of Business BUAD 100 Peer Mentor
    f. Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentor
    g. Office of Multicultural Student Life Multicultural Mentor
    h. Office of Orientation & Transition Orientation Leader
    i. Student Success Center Supplemental Instruction Leader
    j. Student Success Center Tutor
    k. Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentor
    l. University Housing Living and Learning Community Mentor
    m. University Housing Resident Assistant
    n. University Housing Residential Halls Council Executive member
    o. Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentors

2. If you have held multiple peer mentoring roles at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville please indicate the peer mentoring role you have most recently obtained

    a. Center for Leadership & Service Team Leader
    b. Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentor
    c. Center for International Education Peer Mentor
    d. Center for Career Development Peer Career Counselor
    e. Haslam College of Business BUAD 100 Peer Mentor
    f. Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentor
    g. Office of Multicultural Student Life Multicultural Mentor
    h. Office of Orientation & Transition Orientation Leader
    i. Student Success Center Supplemental Instruction Leader
    j. Student Success Center Tutor
    k. Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentor

l.   University Housing Living and Learning Community Mentor
m. University Housing Resident Assistant
n.   University Housing Residential Halls Council Executive member
o.   Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentors

3. For the following questions please response using your answer to question 3, the peer mentoring role you've most recently obtained. Answer the following questions on a scale of 1-10. 1 will indicate that the factor had no influence on your decision to become a peer mentor and 10 will indicate that the factor was very influential in your decision to become a peer mentor. A sample scale is provided below:

a.   Linear format, restricted to one response

Not Influential   **Moderately Influential**   **Very Influential**

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

b. Helping fellow students:

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

c. Establishing a greater sense of self-worth:

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

d. Gain leadership skills:

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

e. Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue:

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

f. Improve your decision making skills:

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

g. Improve your own time management skills:

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

h. Improve your own ability to organize yourself:

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

i. Enhance your own communication skills:

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

j. Improve your own academic skills:

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

k. Establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors:

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

l. Establish meaningful relationships with university staff members:

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

m. Gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity:

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

n. Work with a group of diverse individuals

     1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

3. Please list any additional factors which you believed to be influential in your decision to become a peer mentor:

    a. Open Ended Response, paragraph format

[Separate Page]

4. The researcher will be conducting individual interviews to gather a greater understanding of peer mentor perceptions and expectations. These interviews should last thirty minutes and will accommodate your schedule. If you would be willing to participate in an interview please enter in your University of Tennessee e-mail below. You will then be contacted to schedule an interview. Your participation in an interview will not be linked to your answers in this survey.

    a. Short answer format

    b. Contact E-mail

5. What is your racial or ethnic identification? Please select all that apply:

    a. American Indian or Alaska Native

    b. Asian

    c. Black or African American

    d. Hispanic or Latino/a

    e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

    f. White

    g. Other

    h. I prefer not to respond

6. What is your gender identity?

     a. Female

     b. Male

     c. Another gender, please identify:

     d. I prefer not to respond

7. What is your class level?

     a. Freshman/First-year

     b. Sophomore

     c. Junior

     d. Senior

Appendix B

TABLE 1.

Demographic of Participants by Peer Mentoring Role

Peer Mentoring Role	Total* Peer Mentors	N	Response Rate	% of Total Response
Center for Leadership & Service Team Leader	84	13	15.4	11.8
Center for Health, Education, and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentors	18	11	61.1	10.0
Center for Career Development Peer Career Counselor	11	2	18.2	1.8
Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentor	63	18	28.5	16.3
Office of Multicultural Student Life Multicultural Mentor	86	9	10.5	8.2
Office of Orientation & Transition Orientation Leader	36	12	33.3	10.9
Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentor	178	20	11.2	18.1
University Housing Living and Learning Community Mentor	5	3	60.0	2.7
University Housing Resident Assistant	162	13	8.0	11.8
University Housing Residential Halls Council Executive Member	7	2	28.6	1.8
Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentor	14	7	50.0	7.0
Total	664	110	16.6	100.0

Note. *Includes Peer Mentors who have served in multiple

roles

Appendix C

TABLE 2.

Mean and Mode for Factors of Becoming a Peer Mentor

Factor for Becoming a Peer Mentor	N	Mean	Mode
Helping fellow students	110	8.77 (1.53)	10 (51)
Establish a greater sense of self-worth	110	7.22 (2.36)	8 (17)
Gain leadership skills	110	8.36 (1.83)	10 (36)
Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue	110	5.40 (3.1)	1 (18)
Improve your decision making skills	110	6.36 (2.86)	8, 9 (17)
Improve your time management skills	110	6.40 (2.91)	8 (21)
Improve your ability to organize yourself	110	6.55 (2.74)	8, 10 (18)
Enhance your communication skills	110	8.15 (2.01)	10 (34)
Improve your academic skills	110	5.44 (2.72)	5 (18)
Establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors	110	7.63 (2.32)	10 (27)
Establish meaningful relationships with university staff	110	7.71 (2.33)	9, 10 (27)
Gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity	110	7.25 (2.72)	10 (32)
Opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals	110	7.85 (2.47)	10 (38)

Appendix D
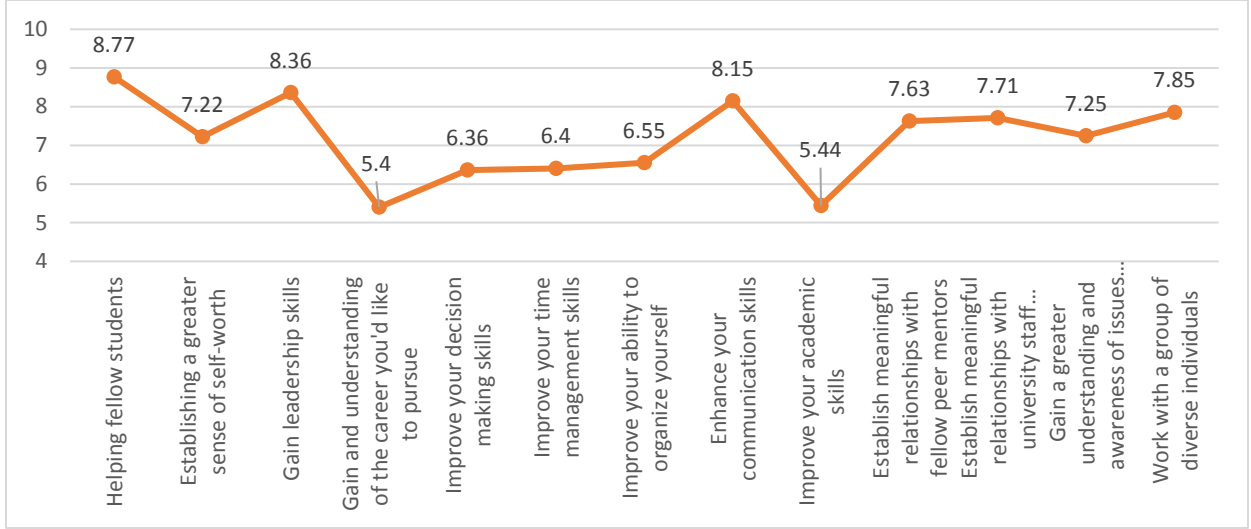
FIGURE 1.

Mean Influence for Factors of Becoming a Peer Mentor

Appendix E

TABLE 3.

Mean Influence of Factors by Peer Mentoring Role

Factor for Becoming a Peer Mentor	Center for Leadership & Service Team Leader n=13	Office of First-Year Studies FYS 101 Peer Mentor n=18	Office of Orientation & Transition Orientation Leader n=12	Volunteer Bridge Peer Mentor n=7	Office of Multicultural Life Multicultural Mentor n=9	Undergraduate Admissions Vol Mentor n=20	University Housing Living and Learning Community Mentors n=3	Center for Health, Education and Wellness Vols 2 Vols Peer Mentor n=11	Center for Career Development Peer Career Counselor n=2	University Housing Resident Assistant n=13	University Housing Residential Halls Council Executive Member n=2
Helping Fellow Students	9.46	8.56	9.25	8.57	8.89	8.75	7.67	8.55	6.50	8.62	10.00
Establish a greater sense of self-worth	7.08	6.94	8.17	7.71	8.22	6.45	5.33	6.91	6.00	7.69	9.00
Gain leadership skills	8.62	8.00	9.17	8.57	8.11	7.75	8.00	8.91	7.50	8.38	10.00
Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue	5.15	4.78	6.58	6.14	6.33	4.05	3.00	7.00	5.00	5.23	8.50
Improve your decision making skills	7.38	5.61	6.83	6.86	5.78	5.05	5.00	7.82	4.50	7	9.50
Improve your time management skills	6.54	5.67	6.83	6.57	6.89	5.15	5.00	6.91	7.50	7.54	10.00
Improve your ability to organize yourself	6.92	6.17	6.17	6.71	6.78	5.85	5.67	6.82	5.00	7.54	10.00
Enhance your communication skills	8.46	7.83	9.17	8.00	7.11	7.55	8.00	8.55	7.50	8.62	10.00
Improve your academic skills	5.23	5.61	5.75	6.86	4.22	4.9	6.33	5.36	6.50	5.31	8.00
Establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors	9.08	6.56	8.75	7.29	7.44	6.1	6.33	8.55	7.50	8.54	9.50
Establish meaningful relationships with university staff	8.62	8.06	8.25	6.86	7.33	6.25	7.00	8.09	7.50	8.31	10.00
Gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity	8.15	6.83	8.67	7.14	7.89	6.4	3.67	7.64	6.00	7.08	8.00
Opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals	9.31	7.61	9.25	7.43	7.56	6.8	6.00	8.55	7.5	7.31	8.00

Appendix F

TABLE 4.

Demographic of Participants by Racial/Ethnic Identity

Racial/Ethnic Identification	*n*	% of Participants	% of UTK Population*
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.9	0.3
Asian	4	3.6	3.1
Black or African American	24	21.8	6.8
Hispanic or Latino/a	3	2.7	3.5
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0.9	N/A
White	75	68.2	78.9
Other	2	1.8	7.4
Total	110	100.0	100.0

Source. *University of Tennessee, Knoxville Office of Institutional Research & Assessment Enrollment Data 2015-2016
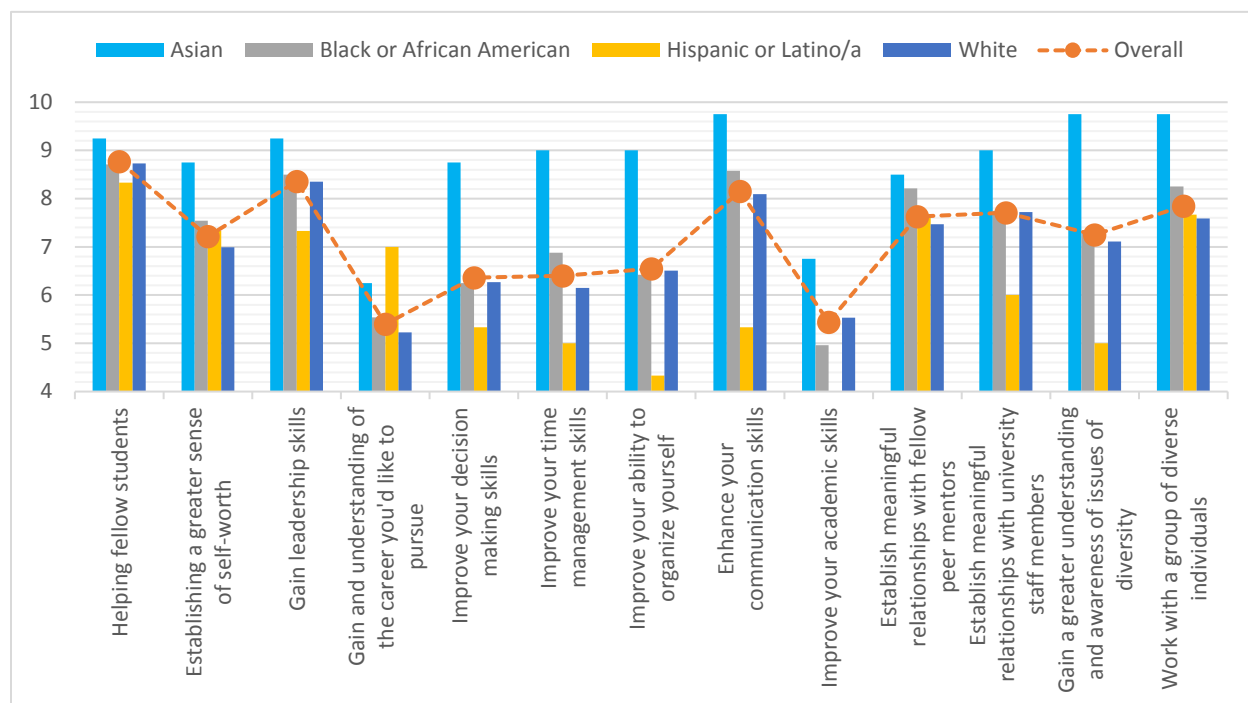
Appendix G

TABLE 5.

Mean Influence of Factors by Racial/Ethnic Identity

Factor for Becoming a Peer Mentor	Overall n=110	Asian n=4	Black or African American n=24	Hispanic or Latino/a n=3	White n=75
Helping Fellow Students	8.77	9.25	8.71	8.33	8.73
Establish a greater sense of self-worth	7.22	8.75	7.54	7.33	6.99
Gain leadership skills	8.36	9.25	8.50	7.33	8.35
Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue	5.40	6.25	5.54	7.00	5.23
Improve your decision making skills	6.36	8.75	6.25	5.33	6.27
Improve your time management skills	6.40	9.00	6.88	5.00	6.15
Improve your ability to organize yourself	6.55	9.00	6.42	4.33	6.51
Enhance your communication skills	8.15	9.75	8.58	5.33	8.09
Improve your academic skills	5.44	6.75	4.96	4.00	5.53
Establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors	7.63	8.5	8.21	7.67	7.47
Establish meaningful relationships with university staff	7.71	9.00	7.75	6.00	7.72
Gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity	7.25	9.75	7.33	5.00	7.11
Opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals	7.85	9.75	8.25	7.67	7.59

Appendix H

FIGURE 2.

Mean Influence for Factors of Becoming a Peer Mentor by Racial/Ethnic Identity

Appendix I

TABLE 6.

Demographic of Participants by Gender Identity

Gender Identification	*n*	%	% of UTK Population*
Female	88	80.0	50.0
Male	21	19.1	50.0
Prefer to Not Respond	1	0.9	N/A
Total	110	100.0	100.0

Source. *University of Tennessee, Knoxville Office of Institutional Research & Assessment Enrollment

Data 2015-2016

Appendix J

TABLE 7.

Mean Influence of Factors by Gender Identity

| Factor for Becoming a Peer Mentor	Overall *n*=110	Female *n*=88	Male *n*=21
Helping Fellow Students	8.77	8.92	8.48
Establish a greater sense of self-worth	7.22	7.24	7.43
Gain leadership skills	8.36	8.45	8.24
Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue	5.40	5.44	5.43
Improve your decision making skills	6.36	6.18	7.38
Improve your time management skills	6.40	6.36	6.81
Improve your ability to organize yourself	6.55	6.47	7.14
Enhance your communication skills	8.15	8.14	8.33
Improve your academic skills	5.44	5.44	5.62
Establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors	7.63	7.6	7.86
Establish meaningful relationships with university staff	7.71	7.74	7.90
Gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity	7.25	7.22	7.67
Opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals	7.85	7.90	7.95

Appendix K
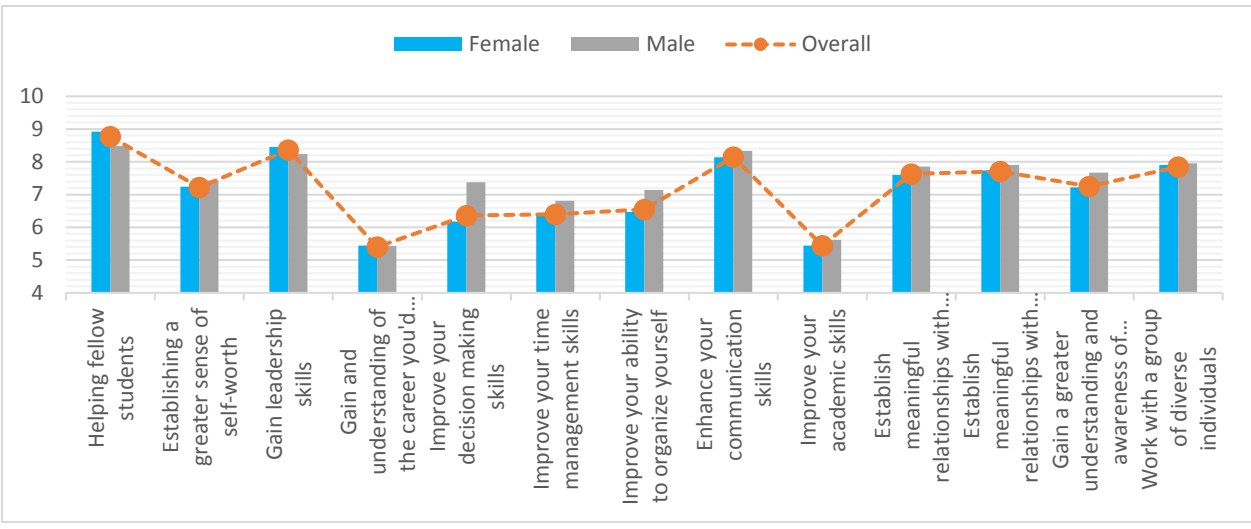
FIGURE 3.

Mean Influence for Factors of Becoming a Peer Mentor by Gender Identity

Appendix L

TABLE 8.

Demographic of Participants by Class Level

Class Level	n	%	% of UTK Population*
Freshman/First-Year	1	0.9	21.7
Sophomore	38	34.6	16.8
Junior	44	40.0	17.3
Senior	27	24.5	21.9
Total	110	100.0	77.7

Source. *University of Tennessee, Knoxville Office of Institutional Research &

Assessment Enrollment Data 2015-2016

Appendix M

TABLE 9.

Mean Influence of Factors by Class Level

Factor for Becoming a Peer Mentor	Overall *n*=110	Sophomore *n*=38	Junior *n*=44	Senior *n*=27
Helping Fellow Students	8.77	8.82	8.75	8.78
Establish a greater sense of self-worth	7.22	7.39	6.77	7.67
Gain leadership skills	8.36	8.84	8.43	7.59
Gain an understanding of the career you'd like to pursue	5.40	5.76	5.50	4.63
Improve your decision making skills	6.36	7.00	6.59	5.04
Improve your time management skills	6.40	6.95	6.23	5.85
Improve your ability to organize yourself	6.55	7.24	6.39	5.78
Enhance your communication skills	8.15	8.58	8.14	7.67
Improve your academic skills	5.44	5.63	5.43	5.07
Establish meaningful relationships with fellow peer mentors	7.63	7.84	8.05	6.59
Establish meaningful relationships with university staff	7.71	7.82	7.95	7.11
Gain a greater understanding and awareness of issues of diversity	7.25	7.39	7.36	6.78
Opportunity to work with a group of diverse individuals	7.85	7.79	8.09	7.48

Appendix N
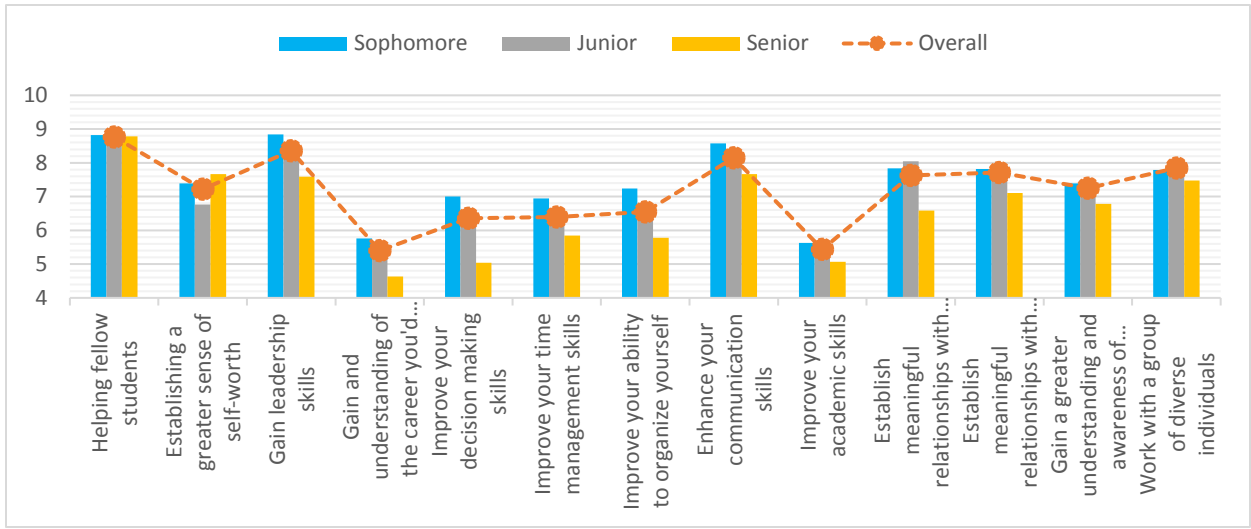
FIGURE 4.

Mean Influence for Factors of Becoming a Peer Mentor by Class Level

Vita

Matthew Hicks was born in Wallingford, Connecticut, to the mother of Debra Hicks. He is the youngest of four sons: Michael, Jason, and David. He graduated from Lyman Hall High School in 2011. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Eastern Connecticut State University in May of 2015. While at Eastern Connecticut State University, Matthew became engaged in a variety of leadership roles on campus. Most notably, Matthew served as an Orientation Leader and the Student Government President. These transformative experiences spurred him to pursue a career supporting college students. In July of 2015, Matthew began his graduate assistantship in the Office of First-Year Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In May of 2017 Matthew received a Master of Science Degree in College Student Personnel from the University of Tennessee. He intends on continuing to support college students throughout his career.