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ABSTRACT

The Faculty Mentoring Program (FMP) at California State University, Dominguez Hills, provides faculty mentors to students defined as "at-risk." FMP aims to encourage faculty-student interaction through a mentoring relationship that will lead to improved student achievement, retention, and graduation and to better faculty understanding of at-risk students such as minorities and older adults. A study examining how mentoring relationships facilitate Latino students' academic adjustment to college surveyed 32 Latino students who participated in FMP. Results indicate that after joining the FMP, Latino students improved on two of the three college adjustment measures: college self-efficacy and academic goal definition. Latino students who were matched with mentors of the same ethnicity perceived their mentors to be more helpful in furthering their career and personal development and were more satisfied with the program than did students who had mentors of different ethnicity. Finally, frequency of contact was positively associated with Latino students' adjustment to college, perceived mentor helpfulness in furthering students' career and personal development, and overall satisfaction with the FMP. (Contains 19 references.) (TD)

**EVALUATION OF A UNIVERSITY
FACULTY MENTORING PROGRAM: ITS
EFFECT ON LATINO COLLEGE
ADJUSTMENT**

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Evaluation of a University Faculty Mentoring Program: Its Effect on Latino College Adjustment

Abstract

The purpose of this project was to understand the mentoring process and how mentoring relationships facilitate Latino students' academic adjustment to college. To this end, data were collected through the Faculty Mentoring Program (FMP) at Cal State University, Dominguez Hills. Thirty-two Latino students participating in the FMP provided information about their relationship with a mentor. Results from pair-wise t-tests revealed that Latino students experienced an increase in two of the three college adjustment measures (college self-efficacy and academic goal definition) after joining the FMP than before participating in the program. Latino students who were matched with mentors of the same ethnicity perceived their mentors to be more helpful in furthering their career and personal development and were more satisfied with the program than did students who had ethnic-other mentors. Finally, frequency of contact was positively associated with Latino students' adjustment to college, perceived mentor helpfulness in furthering students' career and personal development, and overall satisfaction with the FMP.

Latino student retention and graduation at four-year institutions continues to be a major concern among college and university officials. Several programs have been implemented at colleges and universities throughout California to improve the retention and graduation of at-risk ethnic minority students

such as Latinos. To this end, Cal State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) implemented the Faculty Mentoring Program in January 1987 to serve its highly diverse student body. This report focuses specifically on the effectiveness of the CSUDH's Faculty Mentoring Program in facilitating Latino students' adjustment to college.

Latinos comprise the largest ethnic minority group in this nation and have also been identified as the most undereducated group in the country (National Center for Educational Statistics 1992). The growing numbers of undereducated Latino youth poses an enormous cost to this population and to society as a whole. Solorzano (1995) contends that the inadequate educational preparation of Latinos at the pre-college level has already resulted in an immeasurable talent loss to society. For Latinos, it represents a loss of much needed role models for the next generation of Latino youths that aspire to a college education. Because education is the most important determinant of economic success later in life, university programs that actively seek to enhance the academic performance of Latino students should be carefully evaluated

to fully understand how effectively these programs promote academic success in at-risk students.

Most mentoring relationships develop naturally. However, different organizations, including universities, are sponsoring “planned” mentoring relationships to enhance the opportunities of individuals who are less likely to have an informal mentor such as women and ethnic minorities (Betz and Fitzgerald 1987; Nieva and Gutek 1981; Thile and Matt, 1995). It is believed that planned mentoring programs may be a productive way of addressing the college adjustment needs of Latino students. Specifically, a relationship with a mentor may expand the student’s awareness of resources available for coping successfully with demanding academic conditions and, by implication, their sense of personal competence and self-efficacy.

The functions of the mentoring process are perhaps best understood within a Social Network Theory (SNT) perspective (Thompson 1995). SNT posits that resource mobilization, upward mobility and social adaptation are more common among those whose social networks are large and diverse, as opposed to small and undiversified (Zippay 1995). An

acquaintance that has bridging ties to different social environments may facilitate access to resources not readily available from a person's extant network. For at-risk students, faculty mentors serve as role models and offer information and contacts that mentees may not have available in their own social milieu. Furthermore, by developing a close relationship with their mentees, mentors provide emotional support.

In SNT terms, *valence* refers to the perceived emotional quality of relationships with network members (Thompson 1995). Close ties to an informal mentor have been found to promote a positive sense of identity and emotional security in individuals (Garnezy 1985; Rutter 1987; Zippay 1995). Similarly, a quality faculty student mentoring relationship is likely to engender positive self-perceptions in at-risk students, feelings of self-efficacy, personal control, respect for oneself and a sense of being valued and respected by significant others. Once students' perceive they are capable of succeeding, the mentoring relationship may facilitate students' persistence in college by promoting high academic aspirations and a strong focus on educational goals and a future career. According to Tinto (1987), students' level of commitment to their academic

goals is a strong predictor of the likelihood that they will remain in school.

Frequency of contact has been identified as an important and positive property of the mentor-mentee relationship. Levin and Levin (1991) note that “the number, the kind and the quality of student interaction bears heavily on both academic success and social satisfaction” (p. 325). Likewise DuBois and Neville (1997) found that length of relationship and average monthly contact accounted for 63% of the variance in ratings of perceived benefits from the mentor-mentee relationship. This research is consistent with the literature on SNT (Thompson 1995) in which *social embeddedness*, defined as frequency of contact with network members, “potentially integrates individuals into a supportive community” (p. 46).

Another affiliative dimension of the mentor-mentee relationship is *homogeneity*; this refers to the extent that network members share common attributes such as occupational goals, religious values and other features (Thompson 1995). When mentors and mentees share common viewpoints through similar ethnic or cultural backgrounds,

homogeneity may enhance supportiveness. That is, congruence in values, norms, and expectations is believed to foster emotional and instrumental aid (Thompson 1995). Research by Atkinsons, Casas, and Neville (1994) support this contention. They found that participants who mentored ethnically similar students viewed the relationship more positively than did those who mentored ethnic-other students.

Most available information on the effects of formal mentoring programs in higher education focus primarily on educational outcomes such as persistence rates, graduate rates, and grade point average (e.g., Levin and Levin 1991; Thile and Matt 1995). This line of research has resulted in conflicting findings regarding the effectiveness of formal mentoring programs (e.g., Granger 1995; Roberts and Cotton 1994; Thile and Matt 1995). Thus, the purpose of this study was to understand how the mentoring process facilitates the personal and social adaptation of Latino students to college through an evaluation of a university Faculty Mentoring Program (FMP). The following hypotheses regarding the mentoring process are framed within an SNT perspective.

Hypotheses

1. In line with SNT (Thompson 1995), it was expected that Latino students would experience an increase in perceived college adjustment as a function of participating in the FMP. Specifically, FMP students were expected to report higher levels of college self-efficacy, anxiety about succeeding in college, and have better defined academic goals after joining the FMP than before participating in the program.
2. Consistent with SNT (Thompson 1995) notion of homogeneity among network members, it was hypothesized that FMP students who had same-ethnic mentors would report higher levels of college self-efficacy, anxiety about succeeding college and have better defined academic goals than FMP students who had mentors of a different ethnic background. Furthermore, it was expected that Latino students who were ethnically matched to mentors would perceive their mentors as affording them with greater personal and career development than non-matched students. Likewise, ethnically matched students were expected to report greater satisfaction with the FMP than their non-matched counterparts.
3. Finally, social embeddedness (Thompson 1995), defined as frequency of mentor-mentee contact, was expected to positively influence students' college adjustment and the perceived benefits received from the mentor-mentee relationship in terms of personal and career development. Accordingly, frequent student-mentor contact was expected to positively predict students' level of satisfaction with the FMP.

METHODOLOGY

Program Description

The Faculty Mentoring Program at the California State University, Dominguez Hills, provides those students who had been defined as “at- risk” (i.e., ethnic minority students and older adults) with faculty mentors. The goal of the FMP is to encourage faculty-student interaction through a mentoring relationship that will lead to improved student academic achievement, retention, and graduation and a better understanding by faculty of at-risk students. Potential mentees are mailed FMP brochures and invited to participate in the program. Students ultimately decide if they want to participate. Mentors are selected from faculty that expresses a desire to work with students in a mentoring capacity.

Participants

A mail survey was sent to 200 former and present student mentees to evaluate the effectiveness of the CSUDH Faculty Mentoring Program. A total of 65 students responded to the survey of which 49% Latino, 28% African American, 14% European American and 8% other. Only the data

pertaining to Latino students (n = 32) will be discussed in this report.

The Latino sample consisted of 75% female and 25% male ranging in age between 18 and 36 years. The majority of students were born in the United States (90.6%) and were the first in their families to attend college (71.9 %). Approximately half of the mentees had been involved in FMP for at least one-year (46.9) at the time of study. The majority of students joined the FMP during their freshman (34.4%) and sophomore (31.3%) year in college with fewer students (25%) seeking mentors in their junior and senior year. In terms of ethnic similarity, 43.8% of the mentees had a Latino faculty mentor and 53.6% were assigned mentors of a different ethnicity (i.e., African American or European American). Furthermore, the majority of Latino students (81%) were matched to a faculty mentor of the same gender. Finally, although only 25% of students had mentors within their same academic major, most students (53%) met with their faculty mentors on a regular basis (3 to 4 times per month). Table 1 provides more information about the demographic characteristics of Latino students.

Measures

The FMP survey is a two-part instrument designed to tap into mentees' perceived adjustment to college and their perception of faculty mentors and the program itself.

College Adjustment Measures. Three attitudinal indicators were used to assess the students' perceived adjustment to college. Specifically, students were asked to think retrospectively about how they felt before entering the FMP and while participating in the FMP on the following dimensions:

1. *College anxiety*: a 3-item scale that tapped into mentees level of concern about performing well in college and meeting their academic obligations. Items were answered on a four-point scale ranging from "Not anxious" to "Very anxious."
2. *College self-efficacy*: a 3-item scale that assessed students' perception of how likely it was that they would succeed academically in college and establish social ties within the university. Items were answered on a four-point scale ranging from "Not very successful" to "Very successful."
3. *College goal definition*: a 1-item scale that measured how well defined students' academic goals were on a four-point scale ("Not defined at all" to "Very well defined").

Perceptions of Faculty Mentors and the FMP Program.

A modified version of Granger's (1995) 20-item Faculty

Mentor Perception Scale was used to examine the extent and type of support given by mentors to mentees in various areas. All items were answered on 5-point rating scales ranging from “Very helpful” to “Not very helpful. A principal component factor analyses with an oblique rotation was conducted on this measure using the entire sample (N = 65). This analysis yielded two interpretable factors with eigenvalues greater than one and item-loadings on each factor ranging from .40 to .80. This solution also produced factors with good reliability.

1. *Career Development* (alpha = .95) is a 6-item scale that assessed the level of support provided by mentors in terms of helping mentees achieve their educational goals. Example of career development items include your mentor was helpful/not helpful in “connecting you with key people,” “focusing on graduate school,” and “reaching your career goals.”
2. *Personal Development* (alpha = .93) is an 8-item scale that assessed the level of psychosocial support provided by mentors. Sample items include your mentor was helpful/not helpful in “being a role model,” “adjusting to college,” “establishing social ties,” “developing relations with faculty,” “handling personal issues,” and “reaching out to offer help.”

Finally, a gross index of students’ overall satisfaction with the FMP was assessed using a single item 4-point rating scale ranging from “Very satisfied” to “Very dissatisfied”.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1. Pair-wise comparison of mean t-tests were used to assess the hypothesis that students' adjustment to college would improve as a function of participating in the FMP. The results of these analyses provided strong support for this hypothesis. The t-test analyses (see table 2) revealed that Latino students experienced an increase in college self-efficacy and had better defined academic goals after joining the FMP than before participating in the program. However, no mean changes were observed on the college anxiety measure prior to joining the FMP and while participating in the program. This suggests that students' remained concerned about their academic performance while participating in the FMP but then benefited from having clearer defined academic goals and greater self-efficacy in their ability to succeed in college. Hence, the emotional quality or "valence" afforded by the student-mentor relationship appeared to foster a more positive student identity among Latino mentees - internal qualities believed to be critical to college persistence (Terenzini et al., 1994). These findings are in line with prior research conducted by Harris and Brewer (1986) who note that faculty mentoring

enhanced the personal, intellectual, and professional growth of student teachers in psychology.

Hypothesis 2. To examine the role that student-mentor ethnic homogeneity plays in the mentoring process, a number of independent t-test analyses were conducted on the college adjustment measures, the mentor support measures, and the FMP satisfaction measure. In line with SNT (see table 3), the results revealed that students who had same ethnic mentors perceived their mentors to be more helpful in furthering their career and personal development than did students who had ethnic-other mentors. Furthermore, there was a significant trend for students with matched ethnic mentors to perceive themselves as being more self-efficacious academically than did the non-matched students. Finally, students with matched ethnic mentors reported greater satisfaction with the FMP than their non-matched counterparts.

Based on these findings it is clear that homogeneity in cultural background was an important affiliative dimension of the mentor-mentee relationship. Considering that 72% of the mentees were the first in their families to attend college, having a mentor of their same ethnic background may have been

especially important to mentees' personal growth as university students. It can be argued that a Latino mentor was a more salient and identifiable role model for mentees, where similarities in values, expectations and background enhanced the perceived supportiveness and benefits of the relationship. This finding adds to prior research conducted by Atkinson et al. (1994) regarding mentors perceptions of their relationship with mentees. They found in the case of mentors that they, too, tended to attach greater value to relationships with same ethnic students than with ethnic-other mentees.

The importance of ethnic homogeneity in the mentor-mentee relationship has important implications for student retention of Latinos and other at-risk students. It upholds current efforts by some institutions to increase the representation of ethnic minority faculty in academia to better match the composition of the student body. As noted by Thile and Matt (1995), "unless academic institutions are able to promote a continual support system of role models and mentors, students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly less likely to sustain the motivation and belief system necessary for academic success" (p. 118).

Hypothesis 3. Pearson Moment correlations were used to test the hypothesis that frequency of student-mentor contact would positively influence the mentoring process. Consistent with SNT notion of “social embeddedness,” frequency of contact with faculty mentors was positively associated with Latinos adjustment to college (see table 4). Greater frequency of contact between students and mentors was associated with higher levels of perceived college self-efficacy in students, better defined academic goals and a higher level of concern to perform well and meet academic obligations. As noted previously, these attitudinal values have been linked to student retention in higher education (Tinto, 1986; Terenzini, 1994). Also consistent with SNT, frequency of student-mentor contact was positively related to mentors’ perceived helpfulness in furthering students’ career and personal development. Hence, faculty mentors appeared to facilitate students’ personal and academic adaptation to college by affording them with emotional support and resources (i.e., contacts and information) otherwise not readily available to these mentees. Finally, greater student-mentor contact was associated with satisfaction with the FMP.

Student-faculty interaction or social embeddedness within the university social system is believed to be the most critical factor of college persistence (Volkwein, King, and Terenzini 1986; Thile and Matt, 1995). The above findings support this contention and point to frequency of student-faculty contact as the most important determinant of Latino students' personal and social adjustment to college. In the case of Latino students, this type of one-on-one interaction with university faculty mentors may be especially important given they have few role models or natural mentors from the home community to guide them in the journey towards academic achievement.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Working from an SNT perspective, the findings of this study add to existing outcome research by focusing on understanding the mentoring process as it applies to Latino university students participating in a Faculty Mentoring Program. Overall, this investigation illustrated how mentors facilitated Latino students' personal and social adjustment to college by providing emotional support and access to resources

and information. Furthermore, it identified students' level of social embeddedness and ethnic homogeneity in student-mentor backgrounds as important factors influencing the quality of the mentoring process and overall satisfaction with the FMP.

On a cautionary note, the findings of this evaluation are based on a cross-sectional design. Mentoring, however, is a process that would be better assessed through the use of longitudinal methods. Furthermore, this study relied on self-report as well as retrospective data; thus the results reflect students' perception of events which may be inaccurate or biased. Likewise, the sample was relatively small and Latino students who participated in this evaluation may differ in important ways from other Latinos who chose not to participate. Despite these limitations, the applied significance of this evaluation are enhanced by the fact that it is a theoretically driven project based on prior qualitative research (Reigadas and Santos, in press).

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Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Latino Students

VARIABLES	%
Marital Status	
Single	96.8%
Married	3.2%
Household Income	
Under 7500	41.9%
7501-15000	16.1%
15001-25000	9.7%
25001-35000	12.9%
35001-45000	16.1%
55000+	3.2%
Job Status	
Unemployed	15.6%
Part time	71.9%
Full time	9.4%
College GPA	
1.6 – 2.0	3.1%
2.1 – 2.5	6.3%
2.6 – 3.0	53.1%
3.1 – 3.5	25.0%
3.6 – 4.0	6.3%

Table 2
Mean Differences on College Adjustment Measures before Entering the FPM and While Participating in the FMP

VARIABLES	BEFORE FMP	DURING FMP	<i>t</i>
College anxiety	8.48	8.93	2.51
Self-efficacy	7.78	8.91	3.30 *
Goal definition	2.69	3.09	2.52 **

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .005$

Table 3
Mean Differences on Measures of Student College Adjustment, Faculty Mentor Support and FMP Satisfaction by Student-Mentor Ethnic Homogeneity

VARIABLES	STUDENT-MENTOR ETHNICITY		<i>t</i>
	Not Matched	Matched	
College anxiety	8.39	9.70	-1.59 *
Self-efficacy	8.72	9.14	-.65
Goal definition	3.06	3.14	-.27
Personal Development	24.25	32.07	-3.03 ***
Career Development	15.14	22.85	-3.18 ***
FMP Satisfaction	.88	1.85	-1.71 **

* $p < .07$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$

Table 4
Correlations Among all Measured Variables

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Contact with mentor	1.00						
College anxiety	.415*	1.00					
Self-efficacy	.481**	.339*	1.00				
Goal definition	.517*	.116	.492**	1.00			
Personal development	.359*	.125	.07	.279	1.00		
Career development	.399*	.023	.006	.044	.699**	1.00	
FMP satisfaction	.359*	.085	.331*	.08	.069	.344*	1.00

* p < .05; ** p < .01

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