THE MENTORING EXPERIENCE OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS:*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to select an institution that has mandated mentoring as part of its mission and to examine students' perceptions of the mentoring they received. The study selected Empire State College (ESC), a college that is part of the State of New York University system in the USA. ESC is an institution with a 36-year history of mentoring of nontraditional students. The current study represents a follow-up to a prior study that examined the faculty's definitions and theories of mentoring at the same institution. The results of the current study showed that there are significant differences in student alumni perceptions of and experience with mentoring at ESC across a spectrum of gender, race, field of study, and age.

NOTE: This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a scholarly contribution to the knowledge base in educational administration.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

This article will explore how nontraditional undergraduate students[1] perceive the impact of mentoring at Empire State College (ESC) of the State University of New York (SUNY), USA, an institution that has mandated mentoring as part of its mission since 1972. This research is based on the results of a study conducted by interviewing and surveying students at three ESC campuses about their experience with the mentoring program. More specifically, this study analyzed student responses to understand how they perceive the value of such mentoring. The study explored the following research questions: 1) How do students rate their experiences with the mentoring process? 2) How do students perceive the objectives of mentoring? 3) How do students define and describe the roles of their mentors? and 4) What do students value most about mentoring?

This study also addressed questions raised by previous research on ESC as to whether the traditional mentoring models presented in the much of the literature are effective for the needs of new and future

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[1]Nontraditional undergraduate students are defined as those not enrolled full-time or not living on campus.

nontraditional students. The first study investigated how faculty viewed the mentoring process, but did not to examine the perceptions of the institution's alumni. Thus, the question of whether the results of this study on ESC students corroborate the previous study's findings on mentor perceptions, and whether a discrepancy between empirical results and the literature on mentoring persists, will also be examined here. Furthermore, this study's findings on student viewpoints, based on demographic variables such as gender and race, are presented in order to enhance theoretical understandings of transactional learning processes between mentor and mentee.

Conceptual Foundations of the Study

The literature on mentoring has repeatedly called attention to the fact that there is no single definition of mentoring widely accepted by those who practice or study mentoring (Mullen, Cox, Boettcher, & Adoue, 2000). To examine this phenomenon, Jacobi (1991) conducted a comprehensive review of mentoring literature in three categories: higher education, management and organizations, and developmental psychology. Her study concluded that although some areas overlap, there is little consistency in the way mentoring is defined both within and across these categories. This lack of consistency pushes scholars to continually question whether the perfect mentoring approach exists and how mentoring differs among an increasingly diverse group of students in higher education, particularly those categorized as nontraditional. For instance, Murrell (1999) point out that "black women are not as comfortable with mentoring relationships, specifically with white women" (p. 91). Their finding on the discomfort caused by ethnic difference is sustained by Buckley and Zimmermann (2003), who argue that sharing ethnic background is "an essential pre-requisite to the formation of an effective mentor/mentee bond" (p. 21). Similar to these points on ethnicity, Burke, McKean, and McKenna (1991), as well as Kram (1985), contend that gender difference also creates strain between mentor and mentee. It appears that there is agreement among many scholars that ethnic and gender compatibility, particularly for oppressed populations, is a critical component for building effective teacher/student relationships.

Conversely, other scholars express a belief that mentor relationships should be handled across different ethnic boundaries, provided that the mentor "passes sufficient empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a sincere desire to understand their mentee's experiences" (Buckley and Zimmerman 2003, p. 22). Likewise, Mullen (2006) cautions, "one should not assume that alternative mentoring is somehow exempt" (p. 3). Indeed, the benefits of mentoring depend mostly on the creation of an emotional connection; it is possible that bonding can surpass demographic difference (Rhodes, 2002). Yet assessing mentoring outcomes remains particularly difficult in light of the quality of the relationship and the perceived role of the mentor by the mentee; consequently, the literature inconsistently presents theory and data on what makes a good mentor/mentee match (Beier, Rosenfeld, Spitalny, Zansky, & Bontempo, 2000). It is the purpose of this research to further investigate the "when" and "how" of effective mentoring in order to enhance the learning transaction between mentor and mentee.

The SUNY Empire State Mentoring Model

SUNY Empire State College's basic mission is to create "new forms and shapes, new structures and substance, in order to provide and test more effective educational alternatives for individuals of all ages" (ESC Master Plan, 1976, p. 4). ESC built its offerings under the principle of "student centered pedagogy," which allows nontraditional students to shape their own educational programs through guided independent study. This form of pedagogy is provided through faculty who serve not as academic managers, but as mentors. While the primary mode of contact between faculty and students is mandated through the process of mentoring, ESC faculty provides services to their students that relate more to academic advisement than mentoring. Indeed, ESC Faculty have administrative responsibilities that require them to supervise a student's overall progress and academic program. Therefore, while ESC mandates mentoring as opposed to academic management, it has really integrated both mentoring and academic advisement under the auspices of its definition of student centered pedagogy. Every student at ESC is assigned a "primary" mentor. It is this person who provides both mentoring and academic advisement. Each faculty at ESC is responsible for some load of students for which they have "primary" mentoring and advising responsibilities. However, faculty also work with students (specifically within the faculty's academic discipline) to provide just mentoring services. Thus, faculty at ESC need to be diverse and flexible in order to respond to the needs of individual

students. For this reason, faculty mentor, tutor, advise, oversee, protect, model, advocate for, and facilitate the academic work of their students from the day they enter the College until they graduate. Indeed, ESC faculty members must assume, within their role as mentors, administrative responsibilities that require them to supervise a student's academic program and overall progress. ESC's mentoring design is predicated on the idea that an exchange of information between the mentor and mentee during the educational interface is beneficial to all concerned. In other words, what is to be sought is a true collaboration by both parties involved in the learning process. This concept of collaboration is what underscores scholars' positing of a transactional process as a key method for working with nontraditional students. Accordingly, data from the first ESC study corroborated two basic assumptions in the scholarly literature: one, mentoring at ESC is accomplished through regular and ongoing interactions between mentors and mentees, and two, ESC's principle of "student-centered pedagogy" allows mentees to shape their own programs of study with the guidance of their mentors.

Faculty Perspectives: Results from the First Study

The previous study raised a number of questions about the literature on mentoring adult, nontraditional students. These concerns included the multiplicity of definitions of mentoring, the view that mentoring is an appropriate method for the instruction and guidance of nontraditional adult college students, and the assumption that transactional processes of learning in adult education are effective. In particular, the first study reviewed Galbraith's (1991) and Daloz' (1999) research on transactional learning, its relationship to actual mentoring practice at ESC, and new evidence that contrasts with the existing literature. Both Daloz (1999) in Mentor and Galbraith (1991) in Facilitating Adult Learning: A Transactional Process, established that the purposes and objectives of adult mentoring are tied to the goals of learning by transformation. Transforming the individual, according to both authors, occurs best through a transactional process. The transactional process is an educational interface in which teacher and student collaborate so that they exchange information, making the learning experience enriching for both. This style of learning has been identified as particularly appropriate to the adult learner's development, because it draws on his or her existing aptitudes and results in a personal transformation.

However, the data gathered during this first research suggest that there are various and significant ways in which the learning and mentoring practices at ESC differ from what the scholarly literature identifies as the optimal transactional process. Namely, the theories of learning and mentoring exchanges, as proposed by scholars, differ from their practice as evidenced by the ESC study data. In addition, the nature of the mentor/mentee relationship, as described in the literature, contrasts greatly with real-life scenarios at the College. The specific aspects of these differences reveal important ways to improve the educational process, which have not been fully examined in the extant literature.

For instance, transactional theory proposes that a student's learning process, as well as the student-teacher relationship, develops in stages. Moreover, it is suggested that the relationship has an element of personal closeness to it. The goal is that eventually the student will undergo a "transformation" based on pedagogical and personal experience. The data from the first ESC study, however, suggested quite different outcomes. For one, teachers there did not see identifiable – much less predictable – stages of development in either the learning process or in the student-teacher relationship.

Additionally, the first study revealed that rather than focusing on the growth of students in a general intellectual or cognitive sense, mentors seemed to be primarily concerned with helping their students achieve practical goals. This may be attributed to several factors: first, there were time limitations regarding what the mentor could offer the student (not to mention that many ESC students hold jobs which limit their ability to interact in long sessions with their advisors); second, some mentors assumed that intellectual and cognitive growth would inhere in the achievement of the more practical educational goals, which were the main focus of their interaction with students; and finally, most ESC students – due to life circumstances – were already highly self-directed in choosing which goals, practical or otherwise, to achieve, which suggests that they may not have been amenable to new ideas regarding their education.

The other main variant between the projected execution of the theory and the actual results of the data analysis was in the mentor/mentee relationship. The scholarly literature assumes an age and rank gap between mentor and mentee, views the best possible relationship between mentor and mentee as a personal,

even emotional one, and focuses on the potential benefits that may accrue to the mentor as well as the mentee, noting that the relationship should be mutually enriching. However, faculty at ESC had divergent opinions of findings on all three aspects of their relationships with mentees. First, not only might there be less of an age difference between mentor and mentee, thus diminishing the mentor's supposed role as a guide, but in general faculty saw themselves more as facilitators than guides. Second, ESC faculty did not feel – or seek to feel – intensely personal bonds with their students. Finally, ESC faculty saw themselves as operating under a set of practical tenets, in order to reach pragmatic goals, and thus identified themselves as providing a purely "professional" service.

The faculty study raised an important point: the active participation of mentees in the mentoring transaction is essential to the success of the process. Institutions seeking to develop mentoring programs should, therefore, communicate to students early on that they must remain highly engaged if the mentoring relationship is to be effective. Acknowledgement of this kind of involvement in learning might also reduce the number of student mentees who do not complete their programs.

The previous study also found that the institutional formulation of follow-up procedures can help to ensure ongoing dialogue with students, while consequently addressing the problem of mentee attrition. Nontraditional students, especially those with demanding work and personal schedules, have many distractions that can steer them away from their academic careers. Mentees left without attentive and ongoing support from faculty might drift and lose contact with their mentors. To address this risk, an institution must understand its mentee population and establish clear, consistent procedures which reflect that population's needs (Herman and Mandell, 2004 and Mullen, 2006).

The prior research illuminated a variety of inquiries into many dimensions of mentoring, particularly its practice at specific SUNY Empire State College campuses. The implications of that study suggested that broader conclusions could result from expanding the sample beyond faculty members to encompass the entire institution, including its students. Obtaining students' feedback could also provide valuable information on how they perceive the value of mentoring and the quality of their educations. Understanding student perceptions became increasingly important, especially since the College has become more ethnically diversified and now has an increased number of young and less professionally experienced students. The study at ESC also had a low percentage of ethnic diversity in its faculty and did expose that African-American faculty mentors had significant differences in their views of the practice of mentoring with students.

Therefore, the fundamental conclusion that could be drawn from the data generated by the first study was that ESC's mentoring program was designed to help students meet specific objectives rather than foster personal development or relationships. It also should be noted that a suggestion of a close personal tie between a professor and a student, or mentor and mentee, is potentially a problematic one in contemporary academia. These factors, coupled with the more quotidian concerns mentioned above (e.g., diverse student populations), mark the difficulties in having the practice of mentoring meet the theoretical propositions, at least insofar as an institution like ESC is concerned. Given that the mentoring process at ESC is distinctly different from what is set forth in the literature, it might be assumed that the transactional process in general also suffers a difference between theory and practice. The current study illuminates yet a second set of disjuncture, this time in students' perceptions of mentoring, which might compound this difference.

Anticipated Outcomes for the Second Study

The findings from the current research study hoped to contribute to addressing some of the questions raised by the previous ESC study, such as whether traditional mentoring models as presented in much of the literature are appropriate and effective for the needs of new and future nontraditional students. This question was particularly relevant given the increase in the student population, diversity, as well as the growth of nontraditional methods of providing education in a distance learning environment. Nontraditional undergraduate students in higher education are those defined as individuals who are not enrolled full-time and living on-campus per se. The results of this project were also designed to assist ESC with the implementation of a distance education model that can incorporate theory and practice based on its own experiences with mentoring. With the technological advances affecting higher education, methods of using mentoring as a vehicle to work with a larger mass of part-time adult students are critical to understanding how institutions of higher and adult education should set up such programs. The interviews and survey provided an updated

view of how students perceive the role of adult education through the filter of a mentoring process to guide and assist their unique developmental needs. Finally, this study was necessary to validate that the faculty perceptions of how mentoring is practiced at ESC, and its pedagogical effectiveness is shared by students who have actually engaged in the process and graduated from the institution.

Research Methodology for the Current Study: Student Perspectives

In order to properly compare student perspectives with the faculty views, this study needed to have a consistent research design with that of the first study. Therefore, this study used the two same research approaches: the so-called "elite" or expert interview, and a survey instrument. Because the phenomena under investigation were complex and multifaceted, the study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative inquiry. An expert interviewing method was chosen to obtain information about the most appropriate questions to ask participants in the survey. In contrast to "standard" interviewing, in which the investigator defines the problem and questions beforehand, elite or expert interviewing permits the investigator to encourage interviewees to offer their definition of the problem or issue (Dexter, 1970). In this study, the "expert" interviewees were thirteen ESC alumni who graduated between the years 1999 to 2000. Expert students were selected by the dean of each college center. The criteria for choosing a student as an "expert" were that they had graduated from the institution and maintained a 3.0 grade point average. Thus "expert" status was determined based on performance with no correlation to the student's satisfaction with the institution. The deans of the centers were asked, however, to select a relatively even number of male and female alumni.

For the interviews, the researcher used an interview guide (Attachment I) to ensure that the same questions were asked to each former student. The questions posed centered on students' experience with the mentoring process, their perception of mentoring at ESC, how they defined the functions, roles, and responsibilities of their mentor, and what they valued most about the mentoring process. The data collected from the interviews were coded according to their relevance to these research questions, focusing on the patterns and frequencies of similar comments and topics mentioned by interviewees.

A survey was developed from these interview results to collect data from a broader constituency of alumni. The broader interview phase used a mail survey because it minimized sampling error at a relatively low cost, and allowed respondents to take their time in answering complex questions, thus providing responses more accurate than other types of surveys would have permitted (Salant and Dillman, 1994). The survey was sent to 300 alumni. One hundred sixty one – 54 percent of the total – responded. These surveys were analyzed in terms of simple frequencies, as well as in 190 SPSS bivariate correlations testing for chi and lambda significance. Demographic information about survey respondents was also solicited. Included were questions about academic background, area of study, ethnic/racial origin, and gender. Means and standard deviations were calculated for all demographic information to further support conclusions about the survey sample.

Analysis of the Data

Expert Interviews

The expert interviews, used to inform the broader student survey, were conducted face-to-face and participants were not limited to just answering the questions. Many of their commentaries revealed quite varied experiences in the student-mentor relationship. To highlight this, the remarks below, which are presented in an order from students' dissatisfaction to more positive comments about mentoring, represent the extent of this variance:

"I enrolled in ESC mainly because I could receive up to forty credits for life experience, as opposed to the focus on mentoring."

"My mentor was not always available when I needed her and that did affect my experience with the program."

"I never really got a clear explanation of what a mentor does at ESC"

"I offered personal information to my mentor, but I noticed that she was a bit more guarded about what she would share with me on a personal level."

"I saw my mentor as a teacher and a counselor, but not a friend. I needed him to motivate me and push me when needed."

"I always felt school was not for me – the experience at ESC motivated me and gave me confidence."

"I viewed mentoring as an enabler – helping me reach my potential and helping me to identify my best qualities."

"The level of mentoring was great. What was missing I suppose was the ability to hear other students' views, however, the one-on-one mentoring was better for me as I tend to daydream in groups and large classes."

"I saw my mentor as a surrogate parent – some of us need more from our teachers beyond just information – more continual guidance."

The diversity of these comments helped structure the survey questions for the broader study. The results of this broader study indicated that students' demographic backgrounds influenced their experiences of mentoring along the range outlined in the above qualitative statements.

Survey

The frequency analysis of survey responses showed that overall, students viewed the mentoring process as a tool for accomplishing their academic goals in a practical manner, versus as a nurturing, personal relationship. To begin with, the ESC alumni confirmed that mentoring had foremost a pragmatic purpose: the mentor's role was to assist the student on expediently working on his/her degree and finding a job. Mentors' roles such as friend or social contact were viewed as secondary by students, in an aggregate analysis. Students indicated that their own time was at a premium, and that they needed their mentors to assist them with academic, institutional (ESC), and professional questions. Students' secondary responses that mentors could function as friends, or as guides for personal reflection, were further disaggregated by variables such as their gender, age, ethnicity, major, and full/part time status. Table 1 details the demographic composition of survey respondents:

Student Demographic	Total	Male	Female
Gender	161	50	111
Caucasian	132	46	86
African American	14	2	12
Hispanic	8	1	7
Other	7	2	5
Full Time	47	16	31
Half Time	114	34	80

Table 1

Table 1: Demographic Composition of Survey Respondents

Twenty-two significant relationships in the data demonstrated that these variables affect how students perceive mentoring as well as learning. The following sections provide more specifics in each of these areas and point up potential areas of weakness in transactional mentoring. The most salient findings were that while overall students with lower levels of self-confidence rely more on their mentors for moral support, minority and female students feel a relative disadvantage in their ESC experience, and yet tend not to turn to their mentors for help.

Gender

Many females felt they had negative experiences at ESC in terms of difficulty in obtaining needed resources, dealing with difficult professors, and struggling with administrative demands of the College. Furthermore, females avoided seeking assistance from their mentors when they encountered these difficulties, especially in relation to males:

1. Thirty-seven percent of females, vs. 8% of males, stated that difficulty in obtaining needed resources was a very important or critical challenge (p = .004).

2. Thirty-one percent of females, vs. 16 % of males, stated that dealing with difficult professors was a very important or critical challenge (p = .005).

3. Forty-four percent of females, vs. 12% of males, stated that struggling with the administrative demands of ESC as an institution was an important, very important, or critical challenge (p= .038).

While not significant, it was also evident that higher percentages of women than men felt frustrated about their own academic progress; for example, 21% of females vs. 4% of males expressed frustration about not being able to do as well as they wanted (p = .091). Despite their reticence in approaching mentors for academic and administrative concerns, females did tend to look to their mentors for assistance in the area of personal development and growth. Seventy-eight percent of females vs. 50% of males stated that mentor's assistance with personal development and growth was very important or critical (p =.006). Besides the significant impact of gender, the data also showed that non-white students believed they had more negative mentoring experiences than white students.

Ethnicity

Statistical tests were performed on ethnicity as a multi-value variable (Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian-Pacific Islander, and Other), as well as a grouped variable (Caucasian and non-white). Non Caucasian students had more problems obtaining needed faculty and administrative resources, lower levels of self-esteem, and higher senses of academic and social isolation than Caucasian students. Furthermore, they did not seek assistance from their mentors regarding these difficulties:

1. Forty-eight percent of non-whites, including 62% of Hispanics and 46% of African Americans, vs. 24% of Caucasians, stated that difficulty in obtaining needed resources was a very important or critical challenge (p = .023).

2. 2. Thirty-seven percent of non-whites, vs. 11 % of whites, stated that frustrationabout not doing as well as they thought they could was a very important or critical challenge (p = .015).

3. Thirty-eight percent of African Americans, vs. 10% of whites, stated that feeling isolated as a student was a very important or critical challenge (p = .02).

Self-confidence

Similar to the effects of gender and ethnicity, the impact of poor self confidence on students' views of the mentoring process was evident in the data. Students who had feelings of social isolation and frustration with their academic progress tended to rely more on their mentors for personal guidance and understanding than students with higher confidence levels. However, it is intriguing that while women and minorities experienced higher levels of self doubt than white males (as indicated above), and students with higher levels of self-doubt relied more on their mentors for guidance and understanding, women and minorities did not turn to their mentors for help:

1. Fifty-seven percent of students who stated that feeling isolated was a very important or critical challenge also stated that a mentor's role as guidance counselor was very important or critical (p =.020).

2. Seventy-five percent of students who stated that feeling isolated was a critical challenge also stated that their mentor's familiarity with their personal/family situation was very important or critical (p = .007).

3. Seventy-one percent of students who stated that feeling isolated was a very important challenge, and 83% who stated this problem was a critical challenge, asserted that their mentor's role in creating a safe environment was very important or crucial (p = .020).

4. Students who felt frustrated about their academic progress were more likely to place importance on knowing that their mentor was aware of their personal/family situation (p = .002).

Age, academic major, and status as full-time or half-time also appear to influence how students measured the quality of their education.

Age

Older students place more emphasis on the closeness they feel with their mentors and professors:

1. Twenty-nine percent of students aged 36-50, and 23% aged 51-60, stated that the anxiety of working with professors face-to-face was an important, very important, or critical challenge (p= .009).
2. Seventy-three percent of students aged 26-35, 80% aged 36-50, and 80% aged 51-60 stated that knowing that their mentor was familiar with their professional concerns was very important or critical (p = .024 [lambda] with 16% reduction in error).

These results; however, cannot be generalized because of the limited number of students represented in lower age brackets (two under 25, 17 under 35, whereas 134 were over 35).

Major/Concentration

A number of relationships between students' areas of study, their views of the ESC experience, and the importance of mentoring are apparent in the data. While the students' perspectives are distributed relatively evenly so as not to show strong trends according to major/concentration, some tentative conclusions can be drawn from the results:

1. Students with majors in the humanities such as arts, culture, and history, as well as business, community/human services and education, tended to see their mentor as an important guide for self-reflection and personal development more often than students in the math and science fields. Therefore, students' major/concentration correlates with their emphasis on the mentor's role in facilitating personal development (p = .001) and in assisting them in reflecting on their lives in general (p = .005). This finding is not unusual; it is documented in the literature that students majoring in math and science tend to be less reflective than those students concentrating in the humanities and business programs (Langer, 2003; Chatel, 1997, Powell 1997, BeMiller 1987, Meese 1987, Selfe and Arabi 1986).
2. These same students stressed the importance of their mentor's familiarity with their professional concerns. They also appreciated the opportunity to write papers instead of taking exams.
3. Students in the humanities place a higher importance on the practical components of the mentoring process as it relates to their ability to improve their professional growth. Students with majors/concentrations in math and science were more concerned with the clarity and rigor of academic standards (p = .021).

Full/Half-time Status

Although ESC is a nontraditional institution, it considers students who enroll in 12 credits or more as "full-time." All other students are categorized as "half-time" since they must take a minimum number of credits to sustain their matriculation status. The data shows that full-time students expected their mentors to act more as institutional liaisons than half-time students did (p = .019). This difference could be attributed to full-time students' investments in ESC, given that they were more involved with the school. This suggests that there may need to be alternate mentoring styles and infrastructure depending on a student's enrollment status.

Discussion

The statistical analysis of ESC students' views on mentoring revealed a number of important differences between faculty perspectives on mentoring (as described in the original study) and those of students. To begin with, the first study showed that there was a difference in the way mentoring was practiced by faculty in certain disciplines; for example, mentors in the field of art typically attended their student's art shows, seeing this as a unique requirement of their jobs. On the other hand, the results of the current survey show that, among students, there were more philosophical differences in their expectations of their mentors. Whereas students in the humanities and business sought a more personalized mentoring process, students in mathematics and science were more focused on the academic quality of what they needed to learn. Although ESC alumni did confirm that the mentor's role was a practical one; they suggested that "practical" has different meanings depending on the students' major area of study.

Second, the current study had a larger representation of ethnicities than the faculty study. For example, African American faculty in the first study indicated differences in the way they approached their roles as mentors. Unfortunately, because only two African American faculty participated in the research, it was not possible to reach any definitive conclusions as to whether or not African American professors practice

mentoring differently than other mentors. Conversely, the current study supports the concept that students of varying ethnicities need different things from their mentors. This finding may actually support the results of the first study, which suggested that there might be differences in the ways ethnic groups view the roles and responsibilities of a mentor. Although ESC has data that measures the effectiveness of ethnic pairings between mentor and mentee, both the faculty and student studies showed that ethnic students still need a different mentoring approach. Examining the need to implement multiple approaches to mentoring would be consistent with ESC's objective to provide a "student-centered" pedagogical experience. Furthermore, this study showed that female minority students, particularly those with low self-esteem, felt that their mentors did not provide them with adequate support to overcome administrative and bureaucratic challenges at the College.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that ESC students view the mentoring process in very practical terms, and that demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, self confidence, age, major/concentration, and enrollment status mediate the ESC students' experience. ESC has designed an intricate infrastructure that seeks to address the importance of the faculty-student relationship, but over time has not adjusted to human development issues surrounding the mentoring process. While mentoring as discussed in much of the literature is about the steps in a process, what may matter more is identifying the key aspects of what makes students individuals. To that extent, mentoring programs in diverse settings should consider educating students and faculty on how to create effective mentor/mentee relationships wherein each party truly compliments the other's needs and strengths. Such efforts, whether they address the impacts of race, gender, self-esteem, or other characteristics, can only fortify the value of transactional learning processes to both mentors and mentees.

Considerations for Future Research

The statistical analyses from this study also reveal a number of important issues for future investigation. Because the data showed that few female and minority students reach out to their mentors for guidance or advocacy, institutions like ESC should consider providing support structures or mentoring approaches specifically designed to meet the needs of these populations. Finally, researchers might ask what other experiences in the mentoring process could be brought to light in a study with a more even distribution of students across academic majors. Focus groups can also clarify the effects of age, major, year of graduation, and full/part −time status on learning and mentoring at ESC.

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1 Attachment I: Mentoring at Empire State College: Student Alumni Interview Questionnaire Guide

1.1 Experiences with the Mentoring Process

1. How often did you engage in conversation and meet with your mentor? How often were these discussions face to face?
2. Were meetings usually initiated by you or your mentor?
3. Did these meetings usually focus on a specific issue or problem, or did you get together to discuss more general issues?
4. When you met with your mentor, who "controlled" the meeting?
5. Do you think it is the responsibility of a mentor, student, or both, to set academic standards for students?
6. How did your relationship with your mentor influence the academic standards that guided your studies?
7. Did your relationship with your mentor contribute to your growth as a student? A professional? An individual?
8. Were you compatible with your mentor?
9. Did you feel as though your mentoring experience was collaborative?

1.2 Objectives of Mentoring

1. How do you define mentoring?
2. What are the characteristics of an "ideal" mentor?
3. What do you think is the purpose of the mentoring system at ESC?
4. What topics should a mentor and student discuss (e.g., schoolwork, professional work)?
5. How personal was your relationship with your mentor?

1.3 Defining Functions, Roles and Responsibilities

1. Did having a mentor lend to your level of comfort in the college setting? What, if any, specific thing(s) did your mentor do to facilitate this?
2. How do you see the role of a mentor who is working with adult students?
3. What responsibilities does a mentor have to his/her students?
4. Did you see your mentor as a teacher, counselor, friend, or all of these things?
5. Was your mentor a reliable source of information? Support?

1.4 What do Students Value Most about the Mentoring Process?

1. What things did you value most about the being mentored?
2. When you enrolled as a student at ESC, did you know that all students at ESC were assigned faculty mentors?
3. If so, did you choose ESC for this reason?
4. If not, were you pleased to hear about ESC's mentoring program when you enrolled?
5. Did having a mentor enhance your educational experience at ESC? If so, how?