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An Innovative University-Based Mentoring Program: Affecting College Students' Attitudes and Engagement

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Students who had enrolled in an innovative university-based service-learning class were asked to reflect on their expectations prior to mentoring youth attending high-poverty high schools, and whether they believed they had met these expectations post-mentoring. Findings indicated that students primarily were motivated by learning about the effects of poverty and forming ongoing relationships with their mentees, and that these expectations generally were met as a result of their mentoring experiences. The unique service-learning program, which allowed university students to mentor in youths' actual high school classes and provided ongoing support for the mentors, may have been critical components of the learning process and is described in detail. Recommendations for future research and implications for replicating similar service-learning programs are discussed.

Service-learning is designed to provide credit-bearing educational experiences for students to actively address community needs while reflecting on their service activity to further their understanding of course content and enhance their civic engagement (Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005). A primary goal of the service-learning movement in higher education is to increase students' community involvement and awareness of issues of social justice and societal inequities (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Eyler, 2002). The link between experiential learning and personal development is formed through ongoing written reflection explicitly tying community experiences and course content (Correia & Bleicher, 2008; Dunlap, Scoggin, Green, & Davi, 2007). Although little research exists investigating the process through which social awareness and civic engagement are promoted (Einfeld & Collins; Jones & Hill, 2003), the reciprocity of benefits experienced by both the student and the community may be a contributing factor (Schmidt, Marks, & Derrico, 2004).

An additional service-learning goal is to challenge students' negative stereotypes and assumptions about individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds, particularly those from disenfranchised or marginalized groups (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004). A unique challenge occurs when economically privileged college students interact with members of low-income environments during their service-learning experiences (Dunlap et al., 2007; Jones & Abes, 2004), necessitating efforts to counter potential incidences of "blaming the victim" for the effects of one's economic situation (Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Illustre, 2002). For example, Rockquemore and Schaffer (2000) reported that the primarily White affluent college students in their study initially expressed deeply rooted negative attitudes toward the destitute and disenfranchised individuals they encountered during their service-learning experiences. Unless specific strategies are introduced to assist students in adopting a more complex view of a social problem, they may perpetuate the "fundamental attribution error" of locating the problem within the individual rather than considering the context within which a behavior occurs (Rhodes & DeBois, 2006).

Mentoring, in which a caring adult provides support to a youth via a one-to-one relationship, may be an ideal vehicle to allow college students engaged in service-learning to expand their awareness of complex social problems (Parks, 2000). Rather than simply encountering a community environment on a regular basis, establishing a mentoring relationship with a youth necessitates one-to-one interaction with the same person over time. Aside from the potential benefits available to youth in a mentoring relationship—such as social, emotional, and cognitive development (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006)—through repeated interactions, the mentor has an opportunity to see beyond initial impressions to a more complete picture of environmental factors influencing youth development. For example, a mentor from a middle class or affluent background initially may be shocked by a low-income youth's limited academic performance and tempted to blame poor grades or limited skills on "laziness" or "disinterest." However, over time the mentor may become aware of

the cumulative effect on the mentee of poor nutrition, family mobility, inadequate instruction, and limited school resources, and begin to realize the differences in privilege and opportunities available to the youth and those experienced in the mentor's own life. This expanded social awareness may prompt the mentor to challenge her negative assumptions about youth from high-poverty backgrounds and, instead, advocate for societal change and social action (Dunlap et al., 2007; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006).

Despite the dual benefits of mentoring in terms of supporting youth from low-income environments and educating college students about social inequities, few studies of university-based service-learning mentoring programs are found in the published literature. The few that exist provide limited information on the content of the service-learning course or the mentoring process itself (e.g., DuBois & Neville, 1997; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). Further, although mentoring in a youth's own environment has the potential to educate mentors first-hand about the challenges facing at-risk youth, no published study has been found of a university-based service-learning program in which mentoring activities occurred in actual high school classrooms serving high-poverty youth.

This qualitative study extends the literature on service-learning and mentoring by addressing two purposes. The first is to describe an innovative university-based mentoring program in which students enrolled in a service-learning class mentor youth attending high-poverty high schools. We believe this is the first published study in the United States investigating the effects of a university-based service-learning program in which participants mentor high-poverty youth in their actual high school environments versus a setting removed from the youths' own schools or communities (e.g., college campus center). This unique program directly addresses potential stereotyping by college participants by providing (a) a one-to-one mentoring relationship with a high-poverty youth and (b) course content directly related to the effects of poverty on youth, their families, and their environments. The second purpose is to report our findings evaluating the effects of the mentoring experience on the attitudes and engagement of the participating college students as reported by the students themselves. Rarely have we heard directly from college mentors themselves about their experiences (Bordelon & Phillips, 2006; McClam, Diambra, Burton, Fuss, & Fudge, 2008). Therefore, we posed open-ended questions to mentors before and after their mentoring experiences to allow them to reflect on and describe in their own words changes in their attitudes and civic engagement.

The Program

University-Based Mentoring Program

The service-learning mentoring program in this study is an elective course entitled "High-Poverty Youth: Improving Outcomes," taught at a private university in a large metropolitan city in southeastern United States. The purpose of the course is to improve outcomes for youth attending high-poverty high schools through mentoring and to increase participating university students' awareness of (a) the effects of poverty on youth and (b) economic disparities across neighborhoods, schools, races, and ethnicities. The program combines many of the recommended practices found in the literature (e.g., ongoing support and training for mentors, frequent contact with mentees, and formative program evaluation; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). During the 16-week-long semester, students meet in class twice weekly and mentor high school students once or twice weekly at their schools for a minimum of 22 hours over the semester. During class meetings, the instructor facilitates discussions on readings, videos, or speakers that address mentor training, racial segregation, White privilege, poverty, unemployment, the working poor, high school dropout, and related topics.

In addition, participants are required to complete ongoing reflective journals and share their experiences in classroom discussions and focus groups. Students also are required to complete a contract prior to mentoring to identify their expectations for the course and to commit to the mentoring minimum of 22 hours. After mentoring, students reflect on the extent to which they met their expectations. Students receive mentor training and ongoing support in class, at their sites, and via e-mail. Mentoring activities, as identified in students' journals, include befriending, tutoring, supporting, advising, assisting in the college access process, socializing in the community, e-mailing, phoning, and text-messaging. After participating in the class and mentoring for one semester, students are eligible to mentor for a second semester without attending class. A total of 45 hours of mentoring are required for second-year mentors, and as with their first-year counterparts, these students complete weekly journal entries. Approximately one-fourth of the students continue mentoring for a second semester either by enrolling for the class a second time or informally mentoring on their own.

Mentor Participants

Enrollment in the class is capped at approximately 30 students per semester to facilitate interaction among students and supervision of mentors at their mentoring sites. Typically, at least two-thirds of the

class is undergraduates. The majority are White females from middle-class or upper-middle class backgrounds and represent a range of academic majors typically including education, child development, organizational studies, liberal arts, and sciences. Students typically have engaged in multiple community service experiences but few if any have previously mentored youth from high-poverty backgrounds.

Mentee Participants and Settings

Mentees in the program attend one of two comprehensive high schools in the local metropolitan school district of 75,000 students. Both schools offer courses in academic and career preparation and serve students from high-poverty neighborhoods (at least 90% of the student body is eligible for free or reduced lunches). High School A has a graduation rate of 42% and enrolls 1,267 students, of which 78% are Black, 19% White, and 3% other ethnicities. High School B has a graduation rate of 50% and an enrollment of 1,407; 70% of students are Black, 23% White, 5% Hispanic, and 2% Asian. Both schools are identified as "needing improvement" based on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) dictates in response to low graduation rates and test scores. Guidance counselors at these high-need schools typically have case loads of 300-400 students and do not have the time to provide assistance with the college search, college application, and financial aid processes. Eighty percent of residents in the students' neighborhood are Black, 40% are unemployed, and 44% of families live below the poverty level, typically in a household headed by a single female currently or previously receiving public assistance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

Mentor-Mentee Matching Procedure

At the beginning of each semester, the course instructor matches mentors with mentees based on similar interests and career goals, goals for the mentoring relationship, and schedules, as indicated on interest forms completed by mentors and mentees. Based on research indicating that matching by gender, race, or ethnicity does not affect the success of mentoring relationships (DuBois et al., 2002), no effort is made to match students by these characteristics. In addition, because the majority of mentors in our program are White females and the majority of mentees are Black males or females, matching by these variables would be impossible in most cases. Further, evaluation of our program over five years reveals that successful mentoring outcomes do not relate to matching by these traits.

Mentor Training

Component 1. Mentor training occurs during the first few weeks of class. During the first day, former mentors visit class to discuss their mentoring experiences, including challenges and highlights. They also share their advice for new mentors and some share their own feelings of shock, fear, or confusion upon first entering the high schools and finding the lack of resources and disorganization, typical of high-need schools, so different from that of the student's own more affluent high schools. Mentors suggest being proactive, assertive, flexible, and non-judgmental to (a) maximize the mentoring experience and (a) be accepted and welcomed at the mentoring sites.

Component 2. High school students previously mentored in this program are invited to class to share their advice on (a) what high school students from high need schools want from a mentoring experience and (b) how to relate to mentees. Suggestions include: "Don't be afraid of us—we're people, not monsters;" "Always call if you're not going to be here;" and "It's a good experience—you're being a role model for someone who might not have parents or guidance. You're changing someone's life." High school principals from the mentoring sites also visit class to share their perspectives on what to expect in a high-poverty school and what students attending these schools need. For example, one principal shared that 90% of students at her school wanted to go to college; however, many did not know what steps to take to get there. As current class members are matched with their own mentees at their mentoring sites, discussion in class turns to experiences students are currently having with their mentees, how these relate to the principals' and former mentors' and mentees' advice, and problem solving any challenges encountered. Students are asked to relate their experiences to information from class readings, which includes proven practices for enhancing mentoring relationships and testimonies from both experienced and novice mentors.

Component 3. Local experts speak to the class about the college access process for high school students, including ensuring having sufficient credits to graduate, searching for colleges, writing college essays, completing college applications, and applying for financial aid. Speakers underscore the role mentors can play to help students complete the process, particularly in light of the fact that guidance counselors in under-resourced high schools have enormous caseloads and multiple duties, limiting the amount of assistance they can provide to any one particular student. Speakers also stress the importance of support that mentors can provide as their mentees investigate the possibility of attending college. Most mentees in the program are the first members of their families to attend college and much of the college access process is unfamiliar to them. University students, having recently gone through the process

themselves, can help demystify each step of the college application process while encouraging their mentees to “give it a try” even if it seems difficult at first. One speaker suggests that mentors not “burst any student’s bubble” or dream for college or the future because “there are plenty of people out there already doing that.” Rather, it is the mentor’s job to encourage, support, and believe in their mentees.

Component 4. Because most students in the class are White and from fairly affluent families and mentees are overwhelmingly low-income Blacks or members of other racial groups, issues of race, class, and White privilege are addressed as an aspect of cultural awareness. Readings relate to the effect of race and class on youth and their families (e.g., Rothstein, 2004) and the notion of White privilege—the idea that certain unearned privileges are associated with simply having White skin (Wise, 2005). The “Walk of Privilege,” an interactive group exercise, helps many students understand that they may take for granted certain privileges that their mentees likely do not have. Videos and readings address discrimination in housing, employment, and health care that many racial and ethnic groups have faced for centuries and the cumulative effect such discriminative practices have on families.

Component 5. To help mentors focus on their own personal and social development, they are required to complete a pre-reflection contract (Eyler, 2002) comprised of eight open-ended questions prior to mentoring and a post-reflection contract at the end of the semester. Mentors are asked to reflect on their expectations for learning about poverty and inner-city environments, challenging their stereotypes, experiencing personal growth, being a positive role model, and forming ongoing mentoring relationships. Post-mentoring they are asked to reflect on the extent to which they have achieved these expectations and report total number of mentoring hours.

Component 6. Ongoing reflection is a critical aspect of the service-learning process, requiring students to relate their field experiences to what they are learning in class (Ash et al., 2005). A format is provided to guide mentors through the reflective process in completing each weekly journal entry consisting of the following prompts: (a) What activities were going on and what did you do (Describe events in detail.)?; (b) Your personal reflection: (How did the events impact you? What were your frustrations or high points? What changes have you noticed in your mentee[s]? What was their attitude toward you? How did they respond to your activities or advice? What were your conversations like?); (c) How does your experience this week relate to the readings, videos, or class discussion? (Interpret the events that occurred—did they test any of your assumptions? Try to “read between the lines.” How does what went on relate to the bigger issues of high poverty schools, after-school programs, or neighborhoods?); and (d) What is your plan for your next meeting? (e.g., “Next time I go, I plan to…”). Students are asked to type one to two pages for each journal entry at least once weekly and to complete a log of their hours and activities. Journals are submitted three times per semester to the instructor who gives detailed feedback to the mentors and offers suggestions on any challenges they are facing.

Ongoing Support and Supervision

Ongoing support is provided to mentors through the journal feedback process as well as class discussion and focus groups. In addition, the instructor is available by e-mail to mentors and school teachers. Class materials are available on the class Website, and the instructor and students can post any messages or articles of interest to the class or problems they wish to have addressed. On-site supervision of mentoring activities is provided by the instructor and graduate assistants. Graduate assistants’ field notes verify the presence of mentors and mentees, activities performed, and reflections on mentoring interactions. Weekly meetings of the instructor and graduate assistants ensure that potential problems are addressed in a timely fashion and critical information is shared among all program supervisors. The instructor is ultimately responsible for addressing all on-site problems with community partners as well as sharing all positive accomplishments of mentors and mentees.

Method

Study Participants

Participants were 32 students enrolled in the High Poverty Youth elective mentoring class during one semester, of which 31 were female (27 White, 2 Black, 1 Asian, and 1 Hispanic) and 1 was a White male. The majority were undergraduates in their final two years of college (freshmen = 1, sophomores = 4, juniors = 13, seniors = 11), in addition to 3 graduate students. Most students had previous community service experience, but none had previously mentored youth. All students consented to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Prior to mentoring, students were asked to respond in writing to the eight open-ended questions on the pre-reflection contract (see Component 5 - Mentor Training) found in Table 1. Students responded online outside of class. The course instructor explained to the students that the purpose of the reflections was to collect information about their attitudes and expectations prior to the mentoring experi-

Table 1
Pre-and Post-Reflection Questions and Student Responses Categorized by Theme

Goals for Mentors	Pre-reflection f (%)	Post-reflection f (%)
1. Do I want to learn about the effects of poverty in America? If so, please list the areas of specific interest.	Total=68	Total=85
Effect on educational system	20(29)	16(19)
Effect on youth outcomes	16(24)	24(28)
Strategies to address poverty	10(15)	0(0)
Effect on employment	5(7)	4(5)
Race and class issues	5(7)	9(11)
Effect on family dynamics	4(6)	7(8)
Challenges related to poverty	3(4)	16(19)
Effect on housing and communities	3(4)	7(8)
Effect on crime	2(3)	2(2)
2. Do I want to learn about how inner-city schools or community centers function? If so, explain why.	Total=40	Total=69
Increase awareness of low-income schools	12(30)	51(74)
Learn how to improve conditions	11(28)	0(0)
Increase knowledge of community centers	9(23)	9(13)
Explore career interests	8(20)	2(3)
Increase awareness of challenges facing inner-city schools	0(0)	7(10)
3. Do I want to challenge my assumptions and stereotypes of youth from high-poverty neighborhoods? If so, what are my assumptions and stereotypes right now and what do I hope to learn?	Total=35	Total=47
Assumptions about youth being unmotivated	15(43)	16(34)
Assumptions about challenges confronting youth	7(20)	14(30)
Concern about school safety	6(17)	7(15)
Concern about lacking similarities to mentees	4(11)	3(6)
Potential for improving outcomes	3(9)	0(0)
Reinforce some assumptions	0(0)	7(15)
4. Do I want to experience personal growth? If so, what areas am I focusing on (civic responsibility, moral development, etc.)?	Total=50	Total=58
Increase civic engagement	17(34)	25(43)
Increase skills for helping others	17(34)	9(16)
Raise self-awareness	7(14)	9(16)
Increase social awareness	6(12)	12(21)
Explore career interests	3(6)	3(5)
Goals for Mentees		
5. Do I want to learn how to be a positive role model? If so, explain how I intend to do this.	Total=48	Total=52
Model appropriate behaviors and attitudes	15(29)	15(29)
Develop trust and friendship	12(27)	13(25)
Apply acquired knowledge	11(21)	3(6)
Provide positive guidance and emotional support	8(19)	16(31)
Provide academic or college access support	2(4)	2(4)
Address barriers to being a positive role model	0(0)	3(6)
6. Do I want to see actual academic benefits in my mentee from my help? If so, how am I going to assess my mentee's performance?	Total=46	Total=41
Direct academic support	16(35)	8(20)
ACT and other test prep	13(28)	10(24)
Indirect academic support	12(26)	10(24)
College application process	4(9)	5(12)
More beneficial to interact socially	1(2)	8(20)
7. Do I want to be a part of his or her actual college application process? If so, how am I going to do this?	Total=54	Total=46
Explore options with or for mentee	18(33)	12(26)
Assist in application process	16(30)	10(22)
Provide long-term support after class is over	7(13)	6(13)
Assist in ACT and other test prep	6(11)	11(24)
Talk about college	4(7)	5(11)
Visit colleges	3(6)	2(4)
8. Do I want to form an ongoing relationship with this person during the semester? Following the end of this semester? If so, how will I do this?	Total=58	Total=100
Extend relationship outside of site and after the semester	46(79)	69(69)
Establish genuine bond	6(10)	11(11)
Provide consistency and accountability	4(7)	16(16)
Provide academic or college access support	2(3)	4(4)
Total Responses	399	498

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. Post-reflection questions were identical to pre-reflection questions with the exception that wording was in the past tense.

ence, as well as their post-mentoring evaluation of whether their expectations were met. Students wrote their responses in paragraph form and no restrictions were placed on length of response.

Data Analysis

To analyze the resulting qualitative data, we used the constant-comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to identify emergent themes across the 32 students' pre- and post-reflection responses, as follows: (a) Two authors independently classified responses to each question both pre- and post-mentoring into provisional themes based on similarity of meaning. Responses (often lengthy paragraphs) could be subdivided into more than one theme. (b) Classifications of themes were then compared, contrasted, and revised. Based on consensus of all five authors, definitions of themes and rules for inclusion were developed. This process resulted in a total of 46 themes, with an average of 6 themes per question (range = 4 to 9). (c) Responses were independently reassigned to the revised themes by a third author and findings were compared until consensus was reached among authors.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the pre- and post-reflection questions and the 46 themes emerging from the responses. The total number of responses obtained is listed after each question. For example, 68 responses were assigned across 9 themes in response to Question 1 for the pre-reflection and 85 for the post-reflection, respectively. Responses to the open-ended questions were lengthy and could be subdivided and assigned to more than one theme per question (but not moved to another question). For example, in response to Question 2, one student indicated that she wanted to (a) increase her awareness of challenges facing inner-city schools and (b) learn how to improve conditions. Therefore, her response was subdivided into these two themes. Subdividing responses to a question explains why more responses to a question than the total number of participants were possible. For example, although there were only 32 students in the class, there were 47 post-reflection responses to Question 3. Further analysis across questions revealed that responses and themes fell into six major areas based on similarity of content: (a) expectations for learning about poverty, (b) goals for forming mentoring relationships, (c) seeking friendship rather than providing academic support, (d) challenging negative stereotypes and assumptions, (e) increasing university student commitment to civic participation, and (f) learning about strategies to address poverty. These six areas are discussed below, illustrated by representative examples of individual students' actual comments.

Expectations for Learning about Poverty

The greatest number of students' comments pre-mentoring ($n = 68$) was in response to Question1 asking students if they wanted to learn about the effects of poverty. These findings indicated that students primarily expected to learn about the effects of poverty on youth by enrolling in the class. Affirmative post-reflection responses ($n = 85$) even exceeded pre-reflection responses in number, indicating that these expectations generally were met across the semester. For example, post-mentoring comments in response to Question 1 indicated that students had learned much about the effects of poverty on youth outcomes (e.g., "Poverty can cause health and nutrition problems…Poverty can emotionally, physically, and mentally challenge an individual and cause a great stress in their life beyond what I had originally anticipated."). Further, findings indicated that although students rarely expected to learn about challenges associated with poverty and low-income environments, post-mentoring comments suggested that many students did encounter these challenges as shown by comments such as "I've learned more about how poverty-stricken people are stigmatized in today's society…I now understand the domino effect of poverty, how hard it is to get out of poverty, and the extent to which it is detrimental to people's lives."

Goals for Forming Mentoring Relationships

At the same time, the second highest number of pre-reflection responses ($n = 58$) and greatest number of post-mentoring comments ($n = 100$) were for Question 8 asking students if they had formed an ongoing relationship with their mentees. Specifically, students listed a total of 100 different activities or strategies they had used to form ongoing relationships with their mentees during the semester or that they planned to continue to use to maintain their relationships (e.g., sharing lunch, going to the mall, emailing). Results showed that all students desired to form ongoing relationships with their mentees prior to mentoring (e.g., "We have been able to strike up a steady stream of emails to keep in touch on days we do not meet in person. I would like to continue this into the summer and beyond and commit myself to being a part of her life in the next year."), and all but four believed they had achieved this goal and intended to maintain their relationships following the end of the class.

The findings from Questions 1 and 8 suggest that the service-learning mentoring course served a dual purpose for students. It may be that the combination of mentoring high-poverty youth in their actual schools and neighborhood settings alongside the pedagogy of twice-weekly class meetings consisting of readings, lectures, speakers, videos, and discussion

related to the effects of poverty on youth and their families and environments addressed the two most frequently cited expectations by students for voluntarily enrolling in a service-learning youth mentoring class: (a) learning about the effects of poverty and (b) establishing ongoing mentoring relationships. These findings are important because many youth mentoring programs reportedly fail to provide sufficient training, skills, and knowledge to prepare mentors for the challenges of high-poverty environments (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). For example, similar to mentors in other studies (e.g., Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000), comments from students in our study suggested they initially may have experienced some "shock" when encountering the challenges of the environment (e.g., "I was shocked and dismayed by the extremely low graduate rate" and "Going into this class, I believed in the 'American Dream' and anyone can make something of their life. I was really forced to reevaluate my assumptions. These kids experience so much tragedy and carry so much emotional baggage. It is almost unimaginable some of the children want to get out and become first generation college attendees, but they just don't know how. They not only lack the education, but they have no support").

However, twice weekly class meetings that provided support and addressed issues related to poverty may have (a) encouraged students to feel comfortable in the environment and (b) met students' expectations to learn more about the effects of poverty while mentoring youth. Conversely, by providing direct contact with high-poverty environments, the mentoring portion of the class likely enhanced students' understanding of the effects of poverty, as evidenced by the large number of post-mentoring comments related to economic disparities and the challenges of low-income schools. As suggested by Vogelgesang and Astin (2000), in combination, service-learning and mentoring in mentees' own environments may have enhanced both content learning (poverty) and field work (mentoring) for these students.

Seeking Friendship Rather Than Providing Academic Support

Students in our study primarily appeared to be seeking friendship in their mentoring relationships rather than providing academic or college access support, as suggested by students' responses to Questions 5 through 8. All students said they wanted to and did serve as a positive role model (Question 5; e.g., "I praised hard work and encouraged him and emphasized the positives of education. I kept my promises and called and came when I said I would."). However, comments suggested they intended to and did so largely by developing trust and friendships, providing guidance and emotional support, and modeling appropriate behaviors and attitudes, rather than through tutoring or test preparation. Similarly, when asked how students planned to and did form ongoing relationships with their mentees (Question 8), only 2 of 58 pre-mentoring and 4 of 100 post-mentoring comments suggested they intended to or did so by providing academic support (vs. socializing in the community, emailing, attending sports events, etc.). In addition, 10 students responded "No" post-mentoring to the questions "Did you see academic benefits in your mentee?" (Question 6) and "Were you part of your mentee's college application process?" (Question 7), and several students' comments suggested that building friendships with mentees was more important to them than providing academic support.

Although tutoring and supporting students' academic performance are important aspects of mentoring high-poverty youth, as indicated in this study, service-learning students likely are more motivated to become involved in and maintain a mentoring relationship because of the friendship they expect to experience (Portwood, Ayers, Kinnison, Waris, & Wise, 2005). Efforts to maintain students' engagement in mentoring, therefore, should focus on the benefits of friendship development, as well as monitoring the mentoring process to ensure that this goal is being met. Ongoing support, such as that provided in this study, has been identified as a critical component of the mentoring process (Bordelon & Phillips, 2006; DuBois et al., 2002) and likely contributed to the success students reported experiencing in forming ongoing mentoring relationships, which most said they intended to maintain.

Challenging Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions

Responses to Question 3 indicated that students in our study readily admitted holding negative stereotypes or assumptions about youth from high-poverty neighborhoods prior to mentoring (e.g., "To be honest, I have many stereotypes and assumptions of high-poverty youth. I tend to automatically think that some of these students do not want to be in school or do not have dreams beyond high school"), which they wished to challenge and which some students even said they felt ashamed or embarrassed to hold. In general, students reported that these views were changed through mentoring and that they no longer held their preconceived notions regarding a lack of motivation of youth living in poverty (e.g., "I grew up with the assumption that these kids were constantly looking for the easy way out and they weren't motivated enough to create a better life for themselves—this is so judgmental and untrue. No one chooses to live in poverty."). One of the greatest benefits for society resulting from service-learning mentoring programs

like the one investigated in this study may be that participants who previously had limited exposure to high-poverty environments become more aware of social inequities and injustices. Students' comments suggested that they were learning that opportunities and resources in low-income schools and neighborhoods were drastically different from what many of them had experienced growing up and that they no longer perceived youth and their families of being "unmotivated" or "lazy." Rather, students realized that their mentees had the same long-term goals of college and careers that they themselves held, but that overwhelming obstacles, systemic biases, institutional discrimination, and environmental inequities precluded the notion of "separate but equal" educational opportunities for high-poverty youth.

Increasing University Student Commitment to Civic Participation

Question 4 responses suggest that seeing firsthand the inequities that exist across schools and neighborhoods in one of the wealthiest countries in the world not only appeared to dispel students' tendency to "blame the victim" (Moely et al., 2002; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006), but actually prompted these students to increase their civic participation and become actively involved in combating social injustices. For example, one student said

> This semester…helped confirm my belief that I have an obligation to serve and strive to combat educational inequality. I see working to end this inequality as more than a civic duty…I am certain that I have a calling to use my privilege, my access to opportunity, and my set of skills in order to help better the lives of the less fortunate.

Other post-reflection comments were similar: "I definitely feel like these students need our help and since I know about their need how can I sit around and do nothing" and "I learned a great deal about civic responsibility and the importance of helping all members of society. Though they may seem less fortunate, inevitably we are all interlinked as we do share the same society and we must work together to improve the position of all members of society."

A primary aim of service-learning is not only to increase students' awareness of social problems, but to promote their active participation in their communities (Bordelon & Phillips, 2006). Experiencing firsthand the effects of poverty while simultaneously studying them in class may have contributed to students' call to address social injustices as reported in this study (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000).

Learning About Strategies to Address Poverty

Students indicated in their pre-mentoring comments in response to Questions 1 and 2 that they wanted to learn about strategies to address poverty and conditions in low-income schools and community centers. However, no students reported post-mentoring that they had met these expectations. In contrast to comments indicating that they had learned much about the effects and challenges of poverty across a range of dimensions (e.g., "I learned about how poverty affects all aspects of one's life—physical, emotional, mental, health, etc.") and achieved ongoing relationships with their mentees (e.g., "It took time, but with a lot of effort, spending time outside the classroom helped foster a steadily growing relationship."), students apparently did not believe they had learned strategies to address the conditions of the environments they encountered, such as progressive public policy or the reallocation of limited financial resources.

It is likely that this perceived failure related to the extremely high need environments in which these students mentored. For example, both high schools had dropout rates of 50% or more, were in corrective action based on No Child Left Behind criteria, and had 90% or more of students on free or reduced lunch. Direct observation by the instructor across multiple site visits over a 10-year period revealed extreme and widespread school disorganization, high staff turnover, conspicuous lack of resources, rundown facilities, inconsistency in administrative policies, and frequent neighborhood crime. Students' comments indicated their concern and dismay at conditions in these environments in statements such as "I learned firsthand…the hopelessness and the threats to safety that poverty can bring. Seeing these effects through the eyes of my 15-year-old mentee made them so real to me." It may be that students naively entered into these environments thinking that there would be a "quick fix" to solving the problems related to poverty, only to realize the complexity and multifaceted nature of poverty itself and the profound effect it has on people's behavior and attitudes. So that service-learning students do not become discouraged by the ramifications of the problems of poverty and the apparent lack of expedient solutions to address these problems, it is critical to discuss the aspects of poverty that students are likely to encounter, as was provided in classroom sessions for students in this study. Support, training, and problem solving are critical to maintaining students' active engagement, particularly when they are overwhelmed or "shocked" by the problems or conditions they encounter during service-learning experiences (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000).

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this study suggest areas of future

research and practice. First, all data were self-reported by mentors without input from mentees. Second, students' responses could have been influenced by the instructor's biases, although responses were not graded and students completed them online rather than in class in the presence of the instructor. Third, students' level of continued involvement in their mentoring relationships following the end of the semester was not assessed, and long-term effects could not be determined. Fourth, our fairly small ($n = 32$) and somewhat homogenous group of students could not be expected to represent service-learning college students as a whole, and findings may not generalize to other groups, such as community college students. Fifth, additional factors that may have influenced mentoring relationships were not investigated, such as mentors' age, socioeconomic status, career interests, or previous experience in high-poverty settings. Similarly, mentees' family situations, previous mentoring relationships, out-of-school responsibilities, and other personal characteristics were not assessed. Such contextual factors may be critically important in determining the effects of service-learning mentoring programs and warrant further study.

Summary and Implications for Practice

The mentoring program investigated in this study may have had unique characteristics that contributed to students' perceptions that their expectations for mentoring a youth and learning about the effects of poverty were achieved. Specifically, no published study has been found in which a university-based service-learning program addressed the issues of poverty in class and provided mentoring experiences in the actual high schools in which high-poverty youth spent their time on a daily basis. Students in this study experienced the obstacles and challenges that their mentees faced in their everyday lives, such as a high school student enrolled in the wrong algebra class for a year without the option to change classes or another high school student being called on her cell phone during class by her mother urging her to take on a second part-time job so the family would be eligible for Section 8 housing. Rather than simply recreating with their mentees at the mall, movies, or sporting events, students in our study experienced daily life along with their mentees with all the successes and frustrations that this entailed. In turn, such experiences likely enhanced their academic learning in class about the effects of economic disparities, which contributed to their claim that "my experiences this semester have undoubtedly spurred me to take a lifetime role in actively inciting positive change via a hands-on approach to the issues." Replication of similar university-based service-learning programs is recommended to increase the civic engagement of college students in combating educational and societal inequalities.

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