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EXPLORING INFORMAL MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FACULTY AND
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A MIDWEST, URBAN INSTITUTION

THOMAS O. MENCHHOFER

134 Pages

Mentoring has long been a strategy leveraged to support college students' development and academic success. The majority of studies on mentoring have focused on formal mentoring programs that involve a structure and the support of a program administrator. Studies have focused on mentorship outcomes such as increased academic achievement, persistence and retention, and career support. However, research focused on informal mentoring and the process of initiating and developing a relationship remains limited. This study uses qualitative interview data from 6 faculty and undergraduate student mentoring dyads to understand how participants initiate and further develop informal mentoring relationships and the perceived benefits from the vantage point of both dyad members. The study took place at an urban, Midwestern university. The findings of this study offer insights into how faculty and students provide cues to one another during the initiation stage and help establish shared expectations during the cultivation stage of their relationship. Additionally, the study identifies an opportunity to design professional development workshops to assist faculty in establishing a mentoring philosophy to make this meaningful work more manageable.

KEYWORDS: mentorship; informal mentorship; faculty mentors; undergraduate student mentees, mentoring dyads

EXPLORING INFORMAL MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FACULTY AND
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A MIDWEST, URBAN INSTITUTION

THOMAS O. MENCHHOFER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2023

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UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A MIDWEST, URBAN INSTITUTION

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Completing a doctoral degree is a humbling journey. For seven years, I have experienced moments of excitement and joy over new learning, feelings of fear of being an imposter, and moments of humility in witnessing an abundance of growth. Six weeks after completing comprehensive exams, the world experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, and progress on this dissertation halted for almost two years. Every day I questioned whether I had the fortitude to start up again. Fortunately, the unwavering support of family, friends, colleagues, and a brilliant group of cohort members continued to push me forward when I questioned my ability to keep marching on. I share the honor of earning this degree with each of them.

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Thank you to all my family and friends who continued to check in for all these years. To my husband, Joe, who has made innumerable sacrifices to support me through these years, your patience, support, and love mean the world to me. Special mention to Jeff, Mark, George, Jen, Gwen, the Pod+, and many other friends who have cheered me on and given pep talks. Several colleagues have journeyed with me since I was first accepted into the program and deserve a special shout-out--Dani, Peggy, Caryn, and Siobhan.

To the faculty and student participants in this study, I appreciate your willingness to share your mentorship experiences with me. I am humbled by opportunity to capture the beautiful relationships you have formed with one another. I hope that as I move forward and share the results of this study, I do your words and experiences justice.

Finally, I dedicate this project to Susan D. My career, approach to this work, and inspiration for this dissertation are all based on my mentorship experiences with you. You introduced me to the power of mentorship, and I will forever be grateful.

T.O.M.

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
TABLES	vii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Mentorship	3
Defining Mentorship	3
Functions of Mentorship	4
Types of Mentorship	5
Statement of the Problem	5
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions	8
Overview of Methodology	8
Definition of Key Terms	9
Delimitations	10
Significance of the Study	11
Organization of the Dissertation	12
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Mentoring Overview	13
Previous Literature Reviews	14
Mentoring Definitions	18
Mentoring Functions	20
Relationship Phases	20

Types of Mentoring	21
Student Retention and Persistence	30
Social and Academic Integration	32
Validation Theory	33
Social Capital	34
Summary	35
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	36
Overview of Methodology	36
Research Paradigm	36
Research Questions	37
Research Design	37
Sampling and Participants	39
Research Instrument	40
Data Collection Procedures	40
Data Analysis	41
Trustworthiness and Authenticity	42
Credibility	42
Transferability	42
Dependability	43
Confirmability	43
Ethical Considerations	43
Researcher Positionality	44
Summary	45

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS	46
Describing All Saints University and the Study Participants Profiles	47
Faculty Mentors	48
Student Mentors	50
Thematic Results	53
Element of Mutual-Choosing	53
Establishing a Modus Operandi	59
Importance of Shared Identities	63
Faculty as Connectors	65
Overview of the Mentor-Mentee Dyad Relationships	66
Dyad 1: Dr. Wellfield and Claire	66
Dyad 2: Dr. Colleen and Angela	70
Dyad 3: Dr. Danielle and Ruth	74
Dyad 4: Dr. William and Mackenzie	81
Dyad 5: Dr. Graça and Jennifer	85
Dyad 6: Dr. Graça and Toni	88
Summary	91
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION	93
Discussion	93
Summary and Interpretation of the Findings	95
Initiation	98
Cultivation	101
Dyad 7: Dr. Katie (no student mentee)	110

Implications for Practice	114
Study Limitations and Future Research Recommendations	117
Conclusion	119
REFERENCES	121
APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT EMAIL INVITATION	132
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	134

TABLES

Table	Page
1. Mentoring Dyad Descriptions	48

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Most texts date the origin of the concept of mentorship back to Greek mythology, specifically *The Odyssey* (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Daloz, 2012; Mullen, 2005; Smith, 2015). In the *Odyssey*, Telemachus, son of Odysseus, is left in the care of Mentor, a family tutor, when his father departs for battle. Mentor, who is the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena, is disguised as a man and entrusted to counsel Telemachus as he grows into manhood. Mentor teaches the young man to think and act and counsels him as he develops a sense of responsibility and virtue.

My college-going experience bears some resemblance to this mythological story. In my story, I was the son who left his family and home behind to engage in the battle of navigating college. Having grown up in a working-class family and being the first in my family to enroll in college, I faced many of the challenges commonly confronting first-generation college students. I needed access to the social and cultural capital that many of my peers arrived at college prepared to leverage. My knowledge of the formal and hidden curriculum of higher education was limited. The unknowns of this new environment meant my existence on campus felt precarious from the onset. I regularly experienced fear of being exposed as incapable, an imposter, which challenged my ability to take full advantage of the benefits of the college environment. Fortunately, from my first days on campus, a critical relationship with an administrator began to form. Eventually, it gave me a space to process my experiences on campus, learn from my challenges, and seek guidance.

I met Susan during new student orientation in the weeks before my first-year classes began. Even after 25 years, I vividly recall my first interactions with her on that summer day. After submitting an application, an entrance essay, and a headshot, I was admitted to a university honors program where Susan was the program administrator. Part of the orientation day included

a luncheon for new students on the 11th floor of one of the campus buildings. I was anxious as the doors of the elevators opened to the luncheon. Susan was the first to come into view, smiling and extending her hand to greet me. Without introduction, she greeted me by my first name, referenced details from my application essay, and welcomed me into the room. I witnessed how she had taken the time to review those photos and essays as she continued to greet each student as they exited the elevator. The power of that interaction and of feeling seen by someone in that new environment has remained with me for all these years.

Over the next few years, Susan's office became my home base on campus. She provided counsel during my academic exploration as I let go of past dreams to explore new ones. She helped me find opportunities to become engaged on campus and encouraged me to take risks to develop as a leader. She exposed me to what relationships with faculty and staff could look like as an undergraduate student. And she hired me to provide mentorship to other students. Serving in the role of mentor and being capable of providing support to peers had a strong influence on my perceptions of myself as a knowledgeable resource and a resilient student. The confidence I gained through these relationships led to an increased sense of belonging to my institution and a commitment to completing my degree. My access to Susan as a mentor proved critical in navigating the unknown college territory. In retrospect, I have little doubt that I would have dropped out of college had it not been for this special, anchoring relationship with Susan.

This dissertation allows me to explore if other students have had similar experiences with faculty or staff on college campuses. Was this experience of mine isolated and unique, or are there others who have experienced similar moments of transformation with the assistance of mentors on campus? I hope this study provides a space for students and faculty to reflect on

these important relationships in their lives. I seek to learn how we might help encourage the formation of more of these powerful relationships in the future.

Mentorship

Mentoring relationships are commonplace in higher education and have been shown to enhance student development and academic success (Crisp et al., 2017). Undergraduate students who engage in mentoring practices show greater degree attainment and persistence (Espinosa & Espinosa, 2012; Gross, Iverson, Willett, & Manduca, 2015) and increased career ambition and awareness (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Mentoring practices have the potential to address inequitable outcomes for underrepresented student populations such as first-generation (Parks-Yancy, 2012), African American and Latino/a (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Tovar, 2015), and working-class students (Dunstan & Jaegar, 2015).

Defining Mentorship

Over the past thirty years, five reviews of mentoring literature have been conducted (Crisp et al., 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Gershenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Law et al., 2020). As evidenced in these literature reviews, studying the concept of mentorship is fraught with challenges. Mentoring is a poorly defined construct, with rarely made distinctions between mentoring, advising, coaching, and serving as an advocate. Over 50 definitions of mentorship are referenced in the literature (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). Crisp et al. (2017, p. 19) claim there are four points of consensus in mentoring studies in education:

1. *Mentoring relationships are focused on the growth and development of students and can be constructed in various forms.*
2. *Mentoring experiences may include broad forms of support that include professional, career, and emotional support.*

3. *Mentoring relationships are personal and reciprocal.*
4. *Relative to their students, mentors have more experience, influence, or achievement within the educational environment.*

Rather than attempt to settle on a singular definition of mentorship for this study, I reference the four points above when describing the relationship I wish to explore with faculty and student participants.

To differentiate a mentoring relationship from advising or a classroom-based interaction, I will leverage terminology from DeAngelo et al. (2016), in which mentorship would be considered *extra-role* rather than *expected-role* behavior for faculty. Expected role behaviors include classroom practices (i.e., office hours, assignment feedback), advising, and research. Reward structures codify these behaviors, including tenure and promotion processes. Instead, extra-role behaviors fall outside the traditional reward structures, generally involve faculty initiation, and are often motivated by personal experience or a sense of responsibility for students' success. The quality of interactions and intention of the faculty member in establishing the relationship often determines whether the behavior resembles mentorship more than expected role behavior.

Functions of Mentorship

The understanding of the function of mentoring relationships has expanded over the years. Kram (1985), who focused on the world of work, articulated two functions of mentoring: career support and psychosocial support. The function of role modeling (Jacobi, 1991) and academic subject knowledge support (Crisp & Cruz, 2009) came later. When studying mentorship in the higher education context, researchers commonly use Crisp and Cruz's (2009) four functions: psychological and emotional support, degree and career support, academic

subject knowledge support, and role modeling support. These functions will be leveraged in the current study as well.

Types of Mentorship

The literature broadly categorizes mentoring as one of two main types: formal and informal. Within each type, mentorship can occur in individual pairs or dyads, between peers, in groups, or by leveraging technology (e-mentoring). According to Crisp et al. (2017), in their scan, most studies focused on formal mentoring programs. It is common for campuses to design formal mentoring programs around a particular identity, such as race, ethnicity, or first-generation status. These programs can serve an essential function on larger college campuses by establishing more intimate learning communities and connecting students to faculty, staff, and students who share these identities.

Statement of the Problem

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent campus shutdowns changed the college-going experience overnight. Students, faculty, and staff packed up and left campus. Institutional administration and faculty were called upon to envision a new way of completing the educational experience remotely for an unknown period. Persistent college access inequalities, having plagued American higher education since the system's inception, showed themselves in glaring, heartbreaking ways. The learning curve has been steep, and emerging qualitative and quantitative data illuminate myriad challenges this time has presented. According to a National Student Clearinghouse Research Center Snapshot Report (July 2021), the persistence rate of first-time freshmen who began college in the fall of 2019 dropped two percentage points, marking the lowest rate since 2012.

Painfully evident throughout this past year is a need for connection--with loved ones, friends, peers, and specifically for college students, the faculty, and staff who make a college remarkable. These critical relationships can be a space to share our fears, confusions, hopes, and needs. Companionship, whether via technology or in-person interactions, has been essential in combating feelings of isolation. Now more than ever, higher education institutions have an opportunity to promote the importance of establishing mentoring relationships to support the progression, persistence, and, ultimately, graduation of our students.

In the U.S., growing concerns regarding postsecondary graduation and completion rates draw extensive attention and scrutiny. Public outrage over the ever-growing costs of higher education has fueled a movement to consider whether higher education is a worthwhile investment, mainly whether postsecondary education should be considered a public or a private good (Baum & McPherson, 2011). Financial hardships related to the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated concerns about access and affordability. Higher education institutions are being called upon to address the challenges presented by COVID-19 and the growing emphasis on college outcomes, specifically increasing degree completion rates and eradicating outcome inequities across marginalized and underrepresented student groups. Formal mentoring programs and informal mentoring relationships provide opportunities to improve these outcomes (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Dunstan & Jaeger, 2015; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Tovar, 2015). Retention theories broadly reference the importance of a student's social and academic integration, sense of belonging, institutional and goal commitments, and perceived intellectual development and satisfaction with their college experience (Astin, 1975; Bean, 1990; Tinto, 1993, 2012). Mentoring relationships involving faculty, staff, and near-peers provide unique opportunities to

enhance many of these aspects of the college-going experience, which may determine a student's likelihood of persisting through to degree completion.

There is plenty of indication that obtaining a college degree benefits individuals and society more broadly. According to a 2014 Pew Research survey, college graduates outperform their peers without college degrees in almost every measure of economic well-being and career attainment. College graduates, on average, earn \$17,500 more annually, report unemployment at rates of 8.4% lower, and are 16% less likely to live in poverty than individuals without a college degree (Pew Research Center, 2014). Evidence shows that students who complete a bachelor's degree earn over one million dollars more in wages throughout their lifetime than non-graduates (Seidman, 2012; Tinto, 2012). In addition to graduates' economic mobility, going to college provides a forum for students to learn and practice critical thinking skills. This ability to critically analyze information and engage others in debates concerning social issues proves crucial in today's global marketplace (Braxton et al., 2004; Seidman, 2012; Tinto, 2012). For institutions, students' ability to persist has implications for federal and state funding and affects the public perception of the value of higher education (Seidman, 2012).

To respond to the mounting pressure to improve completion outcomes, along with growing numbers of first-generation and racially diverse students enrolling in college, educational leaders must work swiftly to identify strategies to assist students in completing their degrees. Interventions designed to address these concerns remain focused on promoting movement through the curriculum and regularly include a mentorship component.

Limited research on informal mentorship exists, with most studies focusing on formal mentoring programs. Informal mentorship is more challenging to identify, yet past studies have referenced how meaningful these relationships can be for mentees and mentors. Most studies

focus on the outcomes of these relationships, leaving a gap in the literature to explore the establishment and development of informal mentoring relationships between two individuals. Understanding the shared benefits of these relationships remains essential to encourage future students and faculty to engage with one another in this way.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to understand how undergraduate students and faculty members initiate and further develop informal mentoring relationships. Additionally, the study explores the perceived benefits of the relationship from the vantage point of both members of the mentoring dyad. Findings from this study may provide insight into how campus leaders can promote a culture of informal mentorship more broadly.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. How are informal mentoring relationships between undergraduate students and faculty formed?
2. What do undergraduate students perceive to be the benefits of engaging in informal mentoring relationships with faculty?
3. What do faculty perceive to be the benefits of engaging in informal mentoring relationships with undergraduate students?

Overview of Methodology

This study employs an interpretive, qualitative methodology, which Merriam (2002) says provides an opportunity to learn “how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them” (p. 4). Further, this study will apply a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory research builds a theory rooted in real-life situations, often collected

through interviews and observation, and provides insight into how processes unfold or relationships form over time (Charmaz, 2000; Vogt et al., 2014). The data collected provides insight into how undergraduate students develop informal mentoring relationships with faculty over time, making grounded theory an appropriate choice.

This grounded theory qualitative study leveraged individual interviews with undergraduate students and faculty members with whom they have engaged in an informal mentoring dyad. Individual interviews were conducted with each dyad member to understand how they perceived the relationship formed and developed and the benefits resulting from the relationship. Purposeful snowball sampling techniques identified participants at All Saints University. This sampling technique is most suitable as the emphasis of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of these mentoring dyads. Patton (2002) shares that identifying information-rich cases through purposeful sampling allows a researcher to learn about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study. Six mentoring dyads were interviewed, along with one additional faculty member.

Data analysis involved using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1992). I reviewed interview transcripts multiple times using open or line-by-line coding to generate initial categories from the data. Axial coding then identified relationships or connections across categories. Analytical memos were used throughout the data collection and analysis phases to document thoughts, questions, and ideas. I deemed data collection for this study complete at the point of saturation, meaning that newly collected data fit within the categories previously created (Charmaz, 2000).

Definition of Key Terms

This study will involve key terms defined below.

Expected Role Behavior: Formal faculty-student interactions based on departmental or institutional expectations for faculty members, including teaching and research activities and advising (DeAngelo et al., 2016).

Formal mentoring relationships: Formal mentoring practices include structure, and some refer to these practices as “forced or imitation” mentoring (Smith, 2015). Often, a program administrator overseeing the formal mentoring program pairs or assigns mentees with a mentor.

Informal (or natural) mentoring relationships: Informal mentoring usually occurs naturally, relying on spontaneous connections without formal program intervention. Informal mentoring is sometimes considered “true or authentic” (Smith, 2015) or “natural” (Saenz et al., 2015) mentoring. This type of mentorship may involve natural chemistry between two individuals with shared interests.

Mentee: An individual who receives mentoring from someone with more experience or achievement.

Mentor: “Relative to their protégés (mentees), mentors show greater experience, influence, and achievement within a particular organization or environment” (Jacobi, 1991).

Mentorship: Rather than using a specific definition of mentorship, mentoring relationships will involve four characteristics: (1) they will be focused on the growth and development of the student, (2) they include broad support in one or more areas: psychological and emotional support, degree and career support, academic subject knowledge support, and role modeling support, (3) they will be reciprocal, and (4) mentors will have more experience than mentees in the academic environment (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Delimitations

The study delimitations include the following:

- Participants will self-identify as part of a mentoring dyad at All Saints University (student and faculty).
- All Saints University will be the research site due to the primary researcher's proximity to the institution and access to participants.
- Participants will have established their mentoring relationship without the support of a formal institutional program.
- Mentor and mentee will have engaged with one another within the past year and are willing to reflect on their relationship.
- Participants will be limited to individuals who meet the above criteria and agree to complete an interview.

Significance of the Study

While mentorship has been a widely studied phenomenon, as evidenced by an abundance of past literature reviews (Crisp et al., 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Gershenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Law et al., 2020), only approximately one-third of the studies in Crisp et al.'s (2017) most recent review focused on natural or informal mentoring relationships. Research has found that mentees in informal mentoring relationships generally report greater satisfaction than those in formal mentoring relationships (Johnson, 2002; Mullen, 2007). This increased satisfaction is largely due to mutual understanding, respect, and trust that develops over time in these informal or spontaneously formed relationships. Approximately half of the studies focused on relationships between undergraduate students and faculty, with an almost even split between quantitative and qualitative research methods.

This study enriches the qualitative research on informal mentoring by introducing the perspective of both members of a mentoring dyad. Data collected allows for analysis of how

each member recalls the relationship's initiation and development over time and the benefits for each participant. By interviewing several mentoring dyads, this study also provides an opportunity to find similarities and differences across faculty mentors and student mentees to identify grounded theory components.

Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter of the dissertation provided an overview of the research problem, purpose, the research questions that guided the study, and delimitations. Chapter Two provides a detailed literature review on mentorship research. The third chapter describes the qualitative methodology to guide the study and a data collection and analysis plan. Chapter Four discusses the study findings, including participant quotes. The final chapter of this dissertation focuses on interpreting the findings, identifying implications for policy and practice, stating study limitations, and providing recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter surveys the literature on mentorship, including previous literature reviews, research studies, and original texts. In reviewing these materials, I identify the complexity of defining mentorship and review the functions, types, and phases of mentoring relationships. I demonstrate that while many studies focus on formal mentorship programs within higher education contexts and in the world of work, there is a need for more research on informal mentoring relationships. Additionally, a growing line of research has begun to focus on the transformative potential of mentoring for underrepresented populations in higher education, specifically first-generation college students. This review clarifies the need for more research on informal mentoring relationships between undergraduate students and faculty mentors.

This study aims to understand better the experiences of undergraduate college students and faculty who engage in informal mentoring relationships. Understanding the perceived benefits of the relationship from the vantage point of both dyad members will provide insight into how campus leaders can promote a culture of mentorship more broadly.

Mentoring Overview

Most texts date the origin of the concept of mentorship back to Greek mythology, specifically *The Odyssey* (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Daloz, 2012; Mullen, 2005; Smith, 2015). In the *Odyssey*, Telemachus, son of Odysseus, is left in the care of Mentor, a family tutor, when his father departs for battle. Mentor, who is the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena, is disguised as a man and entrusted to counsel Telemachus as he grows into manhood. Mentor teaches the young man to think and act and counsels him as he develops responsibility and virtue. This telling is but one account of the origin story. Others recount this story through various critical perspectives in the literature, including being viewed through political and feminist lenses. While the detailing

of the story varies across these perspectives, the texts I reviewed generally agree that the *Odyssey* introduces the original term mentor.

Previous Literature Reviews

Over the past thirty years, five reviews of mentoring literature have been conducted (Crisp et al., 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Gershenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Law et al., 2020). Two of these reviews have broadly viewed mentorship in education, business, and psychology (Crisp et al., 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Jacobi (1991) and Gershenfeld (2014) narrowed their reviews to mentorship in the higher education context, and Law et al. (2020) focused their review on undergraduate mentoring involving faculty.

In the first review, Jacobi (1991) noted an increased interest in the concept of mentorship, as evidenced by exponential growth in the use of the term mentor in publications between 1975 and 1989. Three key findings emerged from her review: a lack of empirical and theoretical frameworks to guide the study of the concept, inconsistent definitions of mentorship, and methodological design weaknesses in studies. Jacobi (1991) identified three functions of a mentoring relationship: emotional and psychological support, direct assistance with career and professional development, and role modeling. Recommendations for future research included using more descriptive data, rigorous research designs, evaluation of formal mentoring programs, and incorporating theory to link mentoring to academic outcomes. Jacobi (1991) also claimed that more studies were needed that focused on women and underrepresented student populations.

Crisp and Cruz (2009) conducted the second literature review. They found that 18 years after Jacobi's (1991) review of mentoring literature, there was little progress in identifying a consistent definition of mentoring, discovering 50 definitions. While Jacobi (1991) focused on undergraduate students in the United States, Crisp and Cruz (2009) expanded their review of the

research to include undergraduate and graduate students in the United States and abroad. More studies during this period focused on mentoring in relationship to student identities, including gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQ, and first-generation status. Nearly all mentoring studies took place at 4-year institutions, with few having taken place at community colleges, for-profit institutions, or technical colleges.

Overall, Crisp and Cruz (2009) found that between 1990 and 2007, studies contributed to a better understanding of the positive effects of mentoring on student success metrics (e.g. persistence, graduation rates, GPA). In the limited experimental designs found in the review, quantitative studies began to provide insight into the potential causal relationship between mentoring and student academic outcomes. However, concerns regarding methodological design remained, including the need for an operational definition of mentorship, lack of consideration given to confounding variables such as prior academic experience or familial support, and lack of focus on the internal and external validity of studies. Crisp and Cruz (2009) recommended future work needed to provide a better understanding of mentoring program characteristics and activities that should inform design based on theory. They claimed that studies were needed to understand how different student perspectives and backgrounds shape how mentorship is constructed and experienced by these students. To do so, Crisp and Cruz (2009) called for expanding theoretical frameworks to include feminist and critical race theories rather than the traditional theories focused on student engagement (Astin, 1984) and integration (Tinto, 1993). Crisp and Cruz (2009) also noted a need for more focus on the mentor experience and recommended that other researchers explore that aspect of the mentoring relationship in future studies.

Gershenfeld (2014) reviewed an additional 50 studies published from 2008 to 2012 focused on formal mentoring programs. She found that while definitional consistency and research design issues remained, progress was evident in using theoretical frameworks to guide studies. The most commonly applied theory in studies of undergraduate mentoring programs was Tinto's (1993) social integration theory. The review also used a classification system to assess the methodological rigor of the studies. Findings showed minimal evidence of positive change to mentees, indicating that previous concerns regarding methodological rigor persist at the time of this review. Gershenfeld (2014) also categorized the role or function of the mentor and program characteristics for each reviewed study. She mapped the functions to Nora and Crisp's (2007) four functions of mentoring relationships: psychological and emotional support, goal setting and career support, academic support, and role modeling support. More than half of the studies found that mentors served in multiple functions, with the goal setting and career support function least common in program designs. Recommendations from the review called for increased rigor in research designs similar to the past reviews. However, the review also recognizes the importance of future studies that focus on specific operational features of a program, such as mentor-mentee ratios, length and frequency of interactions, functions of the mentor role, and characteristics of mentors and mentees.

Crisp et al. (2017) reviewed 109 studies published between 2008 and 2016 and found that most focused on formal mentoring programs, extending much of the work in the Gershenfeld (2014) review. Only approximately one-third of studies during this period focused on natural or informal mentoring relationships. Researchers conducted much of the work at four-year, Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and focused on a single institution. Approximately half of the studies focused on relationships between undergraduate students and faculty, with an

almost even split between quantitative and qualitative research methods. Case studies and interviews were the most commonly used data collection techniques for qualitative studies, which generally explored expectations, perceptions, and functions of a mentoring relationship. Most often, quantitative studies continued to employ non-experimental designs using surveys and institutional data sets to test relationships between mentoring relationships and varied student outcomes.

Crisp et al. (2017) reported that a more complex understanding of how mentoring relationships can promote social justice and equity emerged in the studies reviewed during this period. A growing number of studies centered on the identity of mentors and mentees in the design of mentoring programs. Additionally, studies more regularly utilized theoretical frameworks and focused on how undergraduate students perceive and experience mentorship. As definitional consistency still presents a limitation in this line of research, Crisp et al. (2017) recommend that future studies focus on differentiating characteristics of a mentoring relationship. These characteristics include mentoring features, forms or sources of relationship, structure, and program types.

Law et al. (2020) provide the most recent, albeit limited, literature review on this topic. Repeating much of the findings of previous reviews, Law et al. (2020) focused on formal mentoring and differentiated between academic, psychosocial, and research programs. The authors argue that without an agreed-upon definition of mentorship, studies should incorporate Nora and Crisp's (2007) mentorship functions, including psychosocial support, career guidance, and academic and program guidance, when designing programs.

In summary, the current study contributes to the previous research by expanding qualitative research on informal mentoring relationships between undergraduate students and

faculty. The study explores mentorship experiences and perceptions of faculty mentors and undergraduate student mentees, utilizing interviews as a data collection technique. The study avoids defining mentorship and instead focuses on the characteristics and functions of a mentoring relationship to learn more about how students and mentors experience mentorship.

Mentoring Definitions

As evidenced in the previous literature reviews, studying the concept of mentorship is fraught with challenges. Mentoring is a poorly defined construct, with rarely made distinctions between mentoring, advising, coaching, and serving as an advocate. Over 50 definitions of mentorship are referenced in the literature (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). The ambiguity in defining mentorship leads to inconsistencies in studying the phenomenon. Studies refer to mentoring as a set of activities conducted by a mentor and as a process or a concept (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Jacobi (1991) reviewed the mentoring literature and identified fifteen definitions derived from education, management, and psychology. I included a sampling of the most referenced definitions from the works I reviewed below.

Blackwell (1989), focusing on educational environments, defined mentoring as “a process by which persons of superior rank, special achievements, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (p. 9). Kram (1985) defined mentoring similarly in organizational management environments as a relationship between a young adult and an older, more experienced adult that helps the younger individual learn to navigate the adult world and the world of work. A mentor supports, guides, and counsels the young adult as he or she accomplishes this important task. (p. 2)

Levinson et al. (1976) studied mentorship from the field of psychology and articulated the complex nature of the relationship between mentor and mentee. “The term ‘mentor’ is generally

used...to mean teacher, adviser, or sponsor. Mentoring is defined not in terms of formal roles but in terms of the character of the relationship and the functions it serves” (p. 97–98). In higher education, mentorship involving near peers has become a common practice. Harmon (2006) defines *peer mentoring* as a “form of peer education where students serve as role models to fellow students and provide them with support and guidance” (p. 56).

While these definitions show differences across researchers, reviewing the mentoring literature has found many shared understandings regarding mentorship. Crisp et al. (2017, p. 19) claim there are four points of consensus in mentoring studies in education:

1. *Mentoring relationships are focused on the growth and development of students and can be constructed in various forms.*
2. *Mentoring experiences may include broad forms of support, including professional, career, and emotional support.*
3. *Mentoring relationships are personal and reciprocal.*
4. *Relative to their students, mentors have more experience, influence, or achievement within the educational environment.*

Rather than attempt to settle on a singular definition of mentorship for this study, I reference the four points above when describing the relationship I wish to explore with faculty and student participants. To differentiate a mentoring relationship from advising or a classroom-based interaction, I will leverage terminology from DeAngelo et al. (2016), in which mentorship would be considered *extra-role* rather than *expected-role* behavior for faculty. Expected role behaviors include classroom practices (i.e., office hours, assignment feedback), advising, and research. Reward structures codify these behaviors, including tenure and promotion processes. Instead, extra-role behaviors fall outside the traditional reward structures, generally involve faculty

initiation, and are often motivated by personal experience or a sense of responsibility for students' success. The faculty member's intention in establishing the relationship often determines whether the behavior resembles mentorship more than expected role behavior.

Mentoring Functions

The understanding of the function of mentoring relationships has expanded over the years. Kram (1985), who focused on the world of work, articulated two functions of mentoring: career support and psychosocial support. Career support includes coaching and sponsorship, while psychosocial support includes role modeling, counseling, and friendship. Jacobi (1991) expanded on Kram's understanding of mentoring functions, including role modeling as a primary function. Jacobi underscored the importance of having a mentor who provides a mentee with someone to look up to and potentially emulate. Crisp and Cruz (2009) took these three functions, personalized them to the higher education context, and added a fourth function. Crisp and Cruz (2009) list the following mentoring functions: psychological and emotional support, degree and career support, academic subject knowledge support, and role modeling support.

Relationship Phases

Most of the texts I reviewed recognize that developmental relationships evolve and need to be nurtured by both mentor and mentee to continue growing. The language used may differ; however, they all broadly connect to ideas of Sanford's (1968) theory of challenge and support. Sanford proposed three developmental conditions: readiness, challenge, and support. Sanford contends that students in college need to be psychologically ready for a challenge and need appropriate support to navigate the challenges of the higher education environment.

Kram (1985), in her work in organizational management, describes four predictable phases of a developmental mentoring relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and

redefinition. Kram describes individuals moving through each phase with changing levels of connection and intimacy, dictating the amount of challenge and support that may be useful in a given phase. Daloz (2012), working with adult learners primarily, claims that the mentor *supports, challenges, and provides vision*. The mentor supports by validating the experiences of the mentee. Challenging a mentee is to “open a gap between learner and environment, a gap that creates tension in the learner” (p. 206). Mentors provide vision by assisting mentees to identify to what end they seek to change. Sanford (1968) claims that this requires self-reflection.

Overall, Sanford, Kram, and Daloz provide some direction for the design of mentoring relationships. When combined with a clear understanding of the intended function of a mentoring relationship, these developmental phases can assist mentoring pairs in understanding how to shift their relationship as conditions in the environment change. From a training or program management perspective, these phases offer a shared language that can prove helpful in normalizing the mentorship experience.

Types of Mentoring

The literature broadly categorizes mentoring as one of two main types: formal and informal. Within each type, mentorship can occur in individual pairs or dyads, between peers, in groups, or by leveraging technology (e-mentoring).

Formal Mentoring. Formal mentoring practices have been common in clinical fields of medicine, law, and business for decades. Mentors have overseen apprenticeship experiences to develop skills, build capacity, and influence mentees’ career and professional identities (Mullen, 2005). The apprentice model of graduate education has leveraged mentorship for a long time; however, a growing literature over the past thirty years affirms the importance of mentors to undergraduate education (Jacobi, 1991). Formal mentoring practices include structure, and some

refer to these practices as “forced or imitation” mentoring (Smith, 2015). Often, a program administrator overseeing the formal mentoring program pairs or assigns mentees with a mentor. These mentorship programs may engage cross-age or intergenerational pairings and are prevalent in community- and school-based mentoring programs.

In higher education specifically, Crisp et al. (2017) identified four types of formal mentoring programs--orientation and university retention programs, mentoring for social justice and equity, peer mentoring, and undergraduate research and honors programs (p. 9). Each type of program overlaps and differs in form, function, and intended outcome. Some focus on the transition to college, while others focus on providing sociocultural support or increasing disciplinary knowledge. However, student retention is a common outcome across these programs. This retention outcome may be supported through academic or social engagement, creating a sense of belonging, or promoting self-efficacy regarding a skill such as research. Crisp and Cruz (2009) argue that these typologies can assist practitioners in developing and assessing mentoring programs that best support their audiences and the intended outcomes of the initiative.

Mentor-Mentee Matching. Several studies have explored the importance of how mentor-mentee relationships form in formal mentoring programs (Bell & Treleaven, 2010; Deng et al., 2021). Bell and Treleaven (2010) studied dyadic formal mentoring relationships at a university, while Deng et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative review of studies that focused on mentorship in the workplace. In both settings, the researchers found increased levels of mentoring support when there is a greater perceived similarity between mentor and protégé (Eby et al., 2013; Ghosh, 2014). While not the focus of this study, it is helpful to note that previous studies found that it was important for both the mentor and mentee to have agency and a say in the matching process (Bell & Treleaven, 2010; Deng et al., 2021). A program administrator can assist in

creating a mentoring culture and brokering the formation of mentoring dyads. However, it is crucial to involve both mentor and mentee at multiple points in the process before finalizing matching (Bell & Treleaven, 2010).

Deng et al. (2021) also provided three sub-categories of individual characteristics, which prove helpful in considering what matters most when encouraging mentoring relationships to form: experiential, surface-, and deep-level characteristics.

Experiential characteristics. Experiential characteristics include educational background, career experiences, and geographic location. Research has found these characteristics positively associated with career and vocational support and relationship quality; however, they are not associated with psychological and social support (Deng et al., 2021, p. 391).

Surface-level characteristics. Surface-level characteristics include physically visible traits such as gender and race/ethnicity. Reviews of past studies in the workplace have found that the association between surface-level characteristics and feelings of mentoring support is small and inconsistent. Psychological and social support was negatively affected by gender dissimilarity, although this effect diminished as mentoring relationships progressed and matured (Deng et al., 2021, pp. 391-392).

Deep-level characteristics. Deep-level characteristics include values, attitudes, beliefs, interests, and personality. Personality traits include openness to new experiences, agreeableness, extraversion or introversion, and conscientiousness. Personality inventories and assessments can be leveraged during matching to ascertain similarities between mentors and mentees. Overall, matching based on deep-level characteristics has shown the most positive association with mentoring outcomes (Deng et al., 2021, p. 395).

For the sake of the current study, it is helpful to explore how these three categories of characteristics influence the formation of informal mentoring dyads. Do faculty or students initially seek out one another based on experiential or surface-level characteristics? Do mentors and mentees report shared deep-level characteristics in mentoring relationships that progress and mature?

Informal Mentoring. Informal mentoring usually occurs naturally, relying on spontaneous connections without formal program intervention. Informal mentoring is sometimes considered “true or authentic” (Smith, 2015) or “natural” (Saenz et al., 2015) mentoring. This type of mentorship may involve natural chemistry between two individuals with shared interests. These relationships may focus on academic, career, or personal interests. An informal mentoring relationship requires one or both participants to see something of value in the other and therefore initiate a relationship without the structure or support of a formal program. While there is little argument in the literature about the potential power of these informal mentoring relationships, there is recognition of the difficulty of establishing and maintaining these relationships and the vulnerability required of each participant.

Researchers have explored informal mentoring relationships between faculty and undergraduate students (Cuseo, 2018; Kuh, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), specifically focusing on female (Hernandez et al., 2017), Black (Brooms & Davis, 2017; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012), Latinx (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Tovar, 2015), first-generation (O’Shea, 2015; Woosley & Shepler, 2011) or LGBTQ (Linley et al., 2016) students. The importance of establishing mentoring relationships where individuals share identities has also been documented (Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; Parks-Yancy, 2012). However, Crisp et al. (2017) report that “the increasing diversity of undergraduate education, coupled with stagnation in the representation of women

and men of color in the professoriate creates conditions under which mentors and protégés are less likely to share the same identities” (pp. 66-67) and that therefore first-generation, African American, and Latinx students do not have equitable access to mentoring support on campuses. In order for institutions to provide the benefits of mentoring to all students, it is imperative to understand how different identities shape one’s perception of the benefit of engaging with a mentor.

In a study exploring how interactions with institutional agents and student support programs influence the persistence decisions of Latino/a students at a large community college in California, Tovar (2015) found small but significant effects on student success outcomes (i.e., GPA). The more a student interacted with faculty outside of the classroom, the higher GPA they achieved; however, these interactions did not influence the student’s intent to persist. Using a social capital framework, Tovar (2015) recommends that informal faculty-student interactions must focus on assisting students in negotiating career issues and transitioning to college experiences if they are to influence persistence decisions.

Similarly, Linley et al. (2016) explored how faculty serve as support systems for LGBTQ students and found that support happens in formal and informal interactions. In the classroom, faculty provide support by confronting homophobic language, using inclusive language, and challenging heteronormative, cisgender discourse in the curriculum. Outside the classroom, faculty provided support in formal interactions, such as showing interest in a student’s well-being during advising conversations or by serving as a student organization advisor. Informally, students reported that faculty support included being visible on campus, attending student events, and serving as a role model or ally.

Brooms and Davis (2017) sought to understand how Black male students made meaning of their college experience and what factors promoted their persistence. Students reported two critical components of their college experience that positively affected their persistence: peer-to-peer bonding, especially with other Black males, and mentoring from Black faculty. While formal mentoring programs improve Black males' experience on campus, Brooms and Davis (2017) argue that informal interactions with faculty members are equally important in improving success outcomes. Faculty mentorship assisted students in leveraging social and cultural capital, allowing for improved navigation through their college experience.

Woosley and Shepler's (2011) study exploring Tinto's (1993) model of student attrition found that similar variables predicted first-generation and non-first-generation students' integration. Perceptions of the campus environment and the ability to find connections or make friends are important predictors of integration for both populations. The findings indicate that while first-generation students may enter with different pre-college characteristics and experiences than their non-first-generation peers, the experiences that lead to their integration once on campus are more similar than dissimilar. Faculty interactions and access to informal mentoring opportunities are important in promoting the persistence of first-generation students.

Several studies have provided insights into women's experiences with informal mentorship in higher education environments. O'Shea (2015) studied the experiences of 17 Australian first-generation college women as they navigated their first year of college. O'Shea found that the women in her study may have benefited from having a "critical friend" (p. 515) who can listen and provide guidance, as the act of narrating one's experience can serve as a powerful learning process for first-generation students. Hernandez et al. (2017) found that women in STEM who participated in an off-site weekend workshop where they connected with a

group of volunteer mentors were later more likely to have multiple mentors than their counterparts who did not participate in the weekend. These women also reported an increased sense of scientific identity and a greater interest in studying science. Increased scientific identity mediated the effect of faculty mentorship on the women's intentions to persist.

These studies highlight a critical finding in the literature about mentoring practices in higher education. When students hold marginalized identities in higher education, traditional forms of mentorship may not provide appropriate support to enhance their academic and social integration. New forms of mentoring relationships need consideration if this work aims to close outcome gaps and increase student persistence.

Comentoring or Collaborative mentoring. Comentoring is a critical and transformative application of traditional mentoring practices centering on the principles of liberation theorists (Freire, 2000; Mullen, 2007). In comentoring or collaborative mentoring models, a partnership between mentee and mentor establishes focusing on reciprocity, shared power, and the creation of networks (Mullen, 2007; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2019). These relationships provide an opportunity to challenge traditional notions of mentorship, including hierarchy, exclusionary practices, and homogeneity (Mullen, 2005).

Central to comentoring practices is a commitment to egalitarianism, shared power, and shared learning (Mullen, 2007). Freire (2000) refers to the power of dialogic learning, which connects to this type of mentorship. The basis of dialogue expects a relationship centered on respect and mutual benefit. Rather than one person acting on another, a dialogic relationship involves working with one another. Relationships with this goal seek to engage others as they gain a deeper understanding of their condition. Through raising one's conscientization, or critical

consciousness, inequitable systems can be critiqued and transformed through these relationships (Freire, 2000).

Mentors and mentees alike must see this relationship as an opportunity to learn and expose themselves to new ideas and worldviews. This approach challenges the hierarchical nature of traditional mentorship models. Instead, the dyad forms with each member equally contributing to the mentorship experience. Both the mentor and mentee must continuously engage in this critical reflection. This study can provide an opportunity to learn from both mentors and mentees if and how they see mentoring relationships as a critical and transformative process.

Multiple mentoring, mosaics, or constellations. The concept of multiple mentorships involves establishing a network of support who can provide opportunities for growth in specialized areas (Mullen, 2007). Tharp and Galimore (1988/1999) coined the term ‘mentoring mosaics’ while Johnson and Ridley (2004) describe the relationships as “mentoring constellations.” These terms reference a primary mentoring relationship supplemented with secondary mentoring relationships. The primary relationship typically is established first, involves a deeper level of emotional bonding, and is longer in duration than secondary relationships. The purpose of secondary mentors is to provide specific functions or share particular identities with a mentee, which the primary mentor cannot provide. Similar to co-mentoring, members of a mentoring mosaic or constellation may interchange roles of mentor and mentee, recognizing the reciprocal nature of mentoring relationships (Mullen, 2007).

Electronic mentoring. Electronic mentoring, or e-mentoring, has grown in recent years in university settings (Mullen & Klimatis, 2019). The primary difference between traditional face-to-face mentoring and e-mentoring is the use of technology-mediated communication

(Neely et al., 2017). E-mentoring can occur in formal and informal mentoring relationships, and engagement can be entirely virtual or in a hybrid format that includes a face-to-face component (Neely et al., 2017). E-mentoring can occur asynchronously through email, texting, or discussion boards or synchronously through video-based platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, or FaceTime. Reviews of the literature on e-mentoring from the early 2000s generally report that the benefits of e-mentoring and face-to-face mentoring are similar (Single & Single, 2005). Benefits unique to e-mentoring relationships often focused on logistics, access, scalability, and flexibility (Shrestha et al., 2009).

Shrestha et al. (2009) conducted a study in the United Kingdom where second and third-year undergraduates provided mentorship to first-year undergraduates using a combination of face-to-face and e-mentoring techniques. The study focused on understanding the mentor experience and how introducing e-mentoring benefited the mentors. Findings supported previous research regarding the benefits of scheduling flexibility and access to mentor participation. Additionally, the study found that e-mentoring allowed for increased scope and reach of the program, the ability to target student populations without stigmatization, and better manage mentee expectations of the mentoring relationship. Finally, the study found that the benefit of impartiality offered by e-mentoring modality may be experienced differently by mentees and mentors, whereby mentees find the benefit more favorable than mentors.

Given the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the remote nature of higher education for an extended period, there is much to learn about how mentorship dyads in this study leveraged electronic means. The concept of impartiality or anonymity often appears in the literature as a potential benefit of e-mentoring, where mentees could share more freely and establish more egalitarian relationships with mentors (Neely et al., 2017; Shrestha et al., 2009). This study

provides an opportunity to learn more about how technology during the pandemic affected the perception of these relationships from the perspective of both the faculty mentor and undergraduate student mentee.

Student Retention and Persistence

The problem of college student departure has been the focus of significant study over the past 75 years (Braxton, 2000; Braxton et al., 2014). Researchers have described this phenomenon using a variety of terms over time, such as student mortality (Berger et al., 2012), student departure (Braxton, 2000, 2004; Tinto, 1993), college dropouts (Astin, 1975; Summerkill, 1962), student attrition (Summerkill, 1962), college retention and completion (Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 2012), and student persistence (Braxton et al., 2014). Studies dating back to the 1960s have shown that only 45% of college entrants graduate (Summerkill, 1962; Tinto, 1993). Student departure has implications for the future of individual students and higher education institutions.

Evidence shows that students who complete a bachelor's degree earn over one million dollars more in wages throughout their lifetime than non-graduates (Seidman, 2012; Tinto, 2012). In addition to graduates' economic mobility, college provides a forum for students to learn and practice critical thinking skills. This ability to critically analyze information and engage others in debates concerning social issues proves crucial in today's global marketplace (Braxton et al., 2004; Seidman, 2012; Tinto, 2012). For institutions, students' ability to persist has implications for federal and state funding and affects the public perception of the value of higher education (Seidman, 2012).

The study of student persistence often centers on the importance of student integration or engagement in the college environment (Astin, 1984; Barnett, 2011; Bean & Metzger, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 1998). Research on student retention utilizing a

student-institutional fit perspective views departure decisions as an outcome driven by the match between a student and a college or university's academic and social environment (Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 1993, 2012). The underlying assumption is that the more successful the match, the more likely a student will remain at an institution. A brief review of the history of this perspective illuminates how a student's perception of congruence with the institutional norms, sense of belonging and connectedness, ability to become involved and engaged within the community, and feelings of integration into the social and academic communities of the institution contribute to decisions to persist and remain enrolled.

Summerkill (1962) argued that prior research on student attrition focused primarily on institutional or administrative concerns and focused less on the psychological and sociological factors contributing to student departure. A decade later, Spady (1971) contended that the interaction between a student's attributes (i.e., values, skills, interests, attitudes) and the norms of the college environment predict student retention. Studies show that when the individual and college find congruence in their norms, the likelihood of persistence increases (Berger et al., 2012; Morrison & Silverman, 2012).

Around the same time as Spady's (1971) contribution, Astin (1975) found that student involvement in academic and social communities was vital to student retention. Astin posited that the amount of physical and psychological energy a student places in the college experience directly influences persistence or departure. Tinto (1993) shared Astin's assertion that student involvement in the college community affects student retention. Tinto (1993) studied the works of Arnold Van Gennep, an anthropologist who explored the concept of tribal societies, and Emile Durkheim, a sociologist who studied suicide (Habley et al., 2012; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Based on these works, Tinto (1993) asserted that assisting students with social and academic

integration was crucial to retention, as a departure from college was the academic equivalent of suicide.

Social and Academic Integration

Incorporating Spady's (1971) work on student characteristics and compatibility with institutional norms with Astin's (1975, 1977) work on student involvement and the ability of institutions to use interventions to enhance a student's likelihood of persistence, Tinto (1993) formulated his interactionalist model of student departure. Tinto's (1993) model is often considered the paradigmatic work on student integration (Braxton, 2000), regularly cited among scholars who study the phenomenon (Barnett, 2011).

Tinto's (1993) interactionalist model of student departure is complex and has been regularly revised, making it challenging to provide a brief summary. Tinto (1993) expresses it as such:

Broadly understood, [the model] argues that individual departure from institutions can be viewed as arising out of a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of the academic and social systems of the institution. The individual's experience in those systems, as indicated by his/her intellectual (academic) and social (personal) integration, continually modifies his/her intentions and commitments (pp. 115-116).

Tinto (1993) demarcates two distinct domains in the college experience, social and academic, noting the importance of integration in both domains. Social integration involves engagement in the college community, such as living on campus, participating in campus activities, and socializing with peers. Academic integration includes membership in the

classroom and interactions with faculty. Both social and academic integration can occur in formal and informal interactions with the campus community. According to Tinto (1993), while interacting with campus community members did not guarantee integration, the absence of interactions might reinforce students' decisions to depart. Tinto (1998) later encouraged that future work should prioritize academic integration as an essential focus of student persistence studies.

Validation Theory

Rendón's (1994) validation theory recognizes the limitations of Tinto's (1993) model due to its focus on a primarily traditional student population. Rendón (1994, 2002) claims that traditional college students historically come from upper- and middle-class backgrounds, are predominantly White, and have received academic and personal validation before entering higher education. Rendón (1994) argues that with increasing numbers of nontraditional students entering college from low-income, working-class backgrounds, and being the first in their families to attend college, expecting these students to find a sense of integration involves additional work by institutional agents. Rendón (1994) states that student validation may be an alternative or precursor to feelings of integration for nontraditional college students. She defined *validation* as "an enabling, confirming, supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (Rendón, 1994, p. 44).

Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) includes six elements. First, rather than expecting students to become involved and increase their sense of integration, validation theory places the responsibility for initiating contact with students on institutional agents such as faculty and staff. This approach does not rely on the idea that students need to understand how higher education systems work and know how to ask for the help they may need. Second, when validation

happens, students feel more capable of learning and have an increased sense of worth. Third, validation serves as a precursor for student development. As validating experiences increase, students are more likely to feel self-confident and get involved. The fourth element is that validation occurs in various environments involving many individuals. Faculty, staff, counselors, coaches, peers, family members, and others can validate students in and out of class. Fifth, validation is an ongoing process rather than an end in itself. Regular validation can enhance students' ability to find connections and take advantage of the opportunities provided by higher education. Lastly, validating experiences is particularly important early in the college experience, particularly in the first year (Rendón, 1994; 2002).

Social Capital

Since the mid-1980s, a growing body of research has shown interest in the relationship between social capital and educational achievement and attainment (Dika & Singh, 2002). Two key scholars spurred on this interest, Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman. The two scholars had different approaches to understanding the same concept. Bourdieu (1986) sees social capital as a tool of social reproduction where the dominant class limits access to resources to less dominant classes. Coleman (1988), on the other hand, views social capital in terms of norms and social control through relationships.

For the sake of this study, I will use the Bourdieuan framework for social capital. Bourdieu defines *social capital* as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21). Bourdieu (1986) contends that the amount of social capital one possesses is contingent upon the size of one's network and the amount of social capital each person in that network possesses. There is a multiplier effect on

how social capital is gained and shared. Social capital is dynamic, and in social spaces, i.e., higher education, the rules of the game are often not codified or explicit. Without access to the social capital of the dominant group in the social environment, navigating the space becomes increasingly difficult (Dika & Singh, 2002). Studies have shown that faculty-student interactions can increase student's access to social capital, particularly Latino/a (Tovar, 2015) and Black students (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

Summary

Researchers have conducted hundreds of studies involving the concept of mentorship over the past 30 years. Most of these studies focused on the design and outcomes of formal mentoring programs. This study builds on the body of literature on informal mentorship practices. Rather than defining mentorship, this study explored each dyad member's experience with the initiation, development, and benefits of informal mentoring relationships. As a result of this study, institutional leaders can consider how to encourage a mentorship culture on their campus.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a discussion of the research methodology, including a rationale for using grounded theory. I describe the research participants, research setting, data collection and analysis procedures, and the role of the researcher. Finally, this chapter details strategies to establish trustworthiness and articulates ethical considerations.

Overview of Methodology

This study employed an interpretive, qualitative research design, which provides an opportunity to learn “how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). This research inquiry “honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). In this study, the data collected provides insights into the mentorship experiences of undergraduate college students with faculty members. Particularly, the findings show how students establish informal mentoring relationships with faculty, how those relationships develop over time and the benefits of this relationship for both students and faculty.

Research Paradigm

An Interpretivist research paradigm underpins this study. Interpretivism, in contrast to Positivism, starts with an understanding that multiple realities exist and are socially constructed by individuals (Creswell, 2013). Research emphasizes the subjective over the objective truth, underscoring the importance of context and culture in the process of knowledge construction. There is inevitably interaction between the participants and the researcher, who uses participant quotes as evidence while acknowledging how their own experience shapes their interpretation. Therefore, reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants as informed by their individual experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

A social constructivist perspective or worldview informs this research study. According to Patton (2002), constructivists “study the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others” (p. 96). This worldview asserts that varied ways of making sense of the world are each valid and worthy of respect. Therefore, research avoids critique of a participant’s experience and seeks to find commonalities across individual experiences. Research questions remain broad so that participants can construct the meaning of a situation through discussions with other individuals (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. How are informal mentoring relationships between undergraduate students and faculty or staff formed?
2. What do undergraduate students perceive to be the benefits of engaging in informal mentoring relationships with faculty or staff?
3. What do faculty or staff perceive to be the benefits of engaging in informal mentoring relationships with undergraduate students?

Research Design

For this qualitative study, I interviewed undergraduate students and faculty members who have engaged in an informal mentoring relationship. I conducted individual interviews with each dyad member to understand how interviewees recalled the initial meeting and further development of the relationship. Additionally, participants provided their perceptions of the benefits of engaging in these informal mentoring relationships.

Qualitative research focuses on how individuals interpret experiences and construct meaning (Merriam, 2009). Key characteristics of qualitative research include conducting research in a natural setting, leveraging the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection, using an emergent design to identify themes or categories, and acknowledging the researcher's positionality and how it informs the interpretation of data (Creswell, 2013). Researchers aim to paint a complex picture of the issue of the study by including rich, thick descriptions in the words of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Utilizing qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of mentoring dyads was important in understanding how each interviewee interpreted their experience with mentorship by allowing for the emergence of themes across participants.

This study utilized a grounded theory approach. Glaser and Strauss (1967) first introduced grounded theory in their text, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Gibson & Hartman, 2014; Vogt et al., 2014). In the broadest sense, grounded theory research builds substantive theory inductively as data is collected (Vogt et al., 2014). While formal theories are generally more abstract and broad in scope, a substantive theory is rooted or 'grounded' in the participants' perspective, is localized, and deals with real-world situations (Gibson & Hartman, 2014; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Vogt et al., 2014). Discovery is the defining characteristic of grounded theory research rather than describing or verifying previous theories (Charmaz, 2000; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

There are multiple reasons grounded theory was the appropriate choice for this study. First, this study employed interviews as the data collection technique to build a theory rather than test or confirm previously identified theory (Charmaz, 2000; Vogt et al., 2014). Second, this

study helps understand how informal mentoring relationships form and develop over time, and grounded theory helps illuminate how processes form over time (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Sampling and Participants

I employed a purposeful snowball sampling method to identify participants for this study. Patton (2002) shares that identifying information-rich cases through purposeful sampling allows a researcher to learn about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study. Snowball sampling involves identifying key informants who serve to identify other key informants to expand access to critical information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). This sampling technique was most suitable as the emphasis of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of these mentoring relationships.

I identified study participants using snowball sampling at All Saints University in two phases. First, I identified and emailed (See Appendix A) faculty members known on campus to provide mentorship to undergraduate students. In the initial invitation email, I requested faculty to suggest additional faculty names who might meet the requirements for participation in the study. Inclusion in this study required that faculty:

1. Self-disclosed that they have engaged in an informal mentoring relationship with an undergraduate student within the past two years. The study defined *informal mentoring* as a relationship forming outside of the structure of a formal mentoring program which often involves an application/invitation for participation, a matching process, and potentially a program administrator providing oversight.
2. Agreed to identify a student mentee and encourage their participation in the study.
3. Agreed to participate in a virtual, Zoom interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes and any follow-up interviews, as needed.

Once a faculty member agreed to participate in the study and identified a student mentee, I provided them with an email template (See Appendix A), which they could forward to their mentee requesting participation. When a faculty member felt more comfortable with me conducting the outreach to their mentee on their behalf, I emailed the student using the template. I copied the faculty member on the email. From that point forward, all communication occurred between each participant and me separately.

Research Instrument

The study leveraged semi-structured interview questions and an interview protocol. An interview guide provides broad topics the interviewer can explore and probe to elucidate a participant's understanding of a subject (Patton, 2002). The interview began by learning about each participant's personal and institutional context. Next, participants provided broad reflections on the relationship with their mentor or mentee. Finally, the interviews concluded with participants describing their perceptions of the benefits of engaging in this mentoring relationship. Appendix B includes a copy of the interview protocol.

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving approval from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at both All Saints University and Illinois State University, I conducted email outreach (See Appendix A) to individual faculty members known on campus to provide mentorship to undergraduate students, as described in the Participants section above. As faculty and student mentees agreed to participate, I scheduled individual Zoom interviews with each dyad member. Participants received a digital copy of a consent form that described the study, outlined the voluntary nature of participation, and included contact information for the study's principal researchers.

Interviews lasted 30-60 minutes, with faculty interviews typically lasting longer than student interviews. Using Zoom settings, interview participants indicated permission to record the interviews at the onset of the interaction. Interviewees agreed to conduct the interviews with cameras on. The transcription feature in Zoom provided an initial transcript of the conversation. Once completed, I saved a copy of the video recording of each interview and the Zoom transcript to my OneDrive account. Within several days of the interview, I reviewed the video recording and updated and corrected the initial Zoom transcription document.

Data Analysis

In grounded theory research, emerging data is categorized and defined through coding as it is collected (Charmaz, 2000; Vogt et al., 2014). I used the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1992) for data analysis. This method involved constantly comparing data across individuals and within mentoring dyads to find points of similarity and difference. I transcribed interviews shortly after each interview took place and began the initial analysis immediately. After each subsequent interview, this process repeated, and data were compared to prior transcripts to identify emerging categories.

To analyze the data, I started with open or line-by-line coding. This stage of analysis allowed for the inductive building of ideas and categories rather than attempting to force extant theories onto the data (Charmaz, 2000). Reviewing each transcription several times using line-by-line analysis surfaced patterns of keywords and phrases. The process of memo writing documented initial thoughts, questions, and assumptions and informed data collection priorities for future interviews (Charmaz, 2000, p. 517). The next stage of analysis involved axial coding. I reviewed categories that surfaced through line-by-line coding and identified connections or relationships between initial categories (Charmaz, 2000). This process repeated as more

interviews took place. At the point of saturation, I deemed the data collection for this study complete, meaning that newly collected data fit within the categories previously created (Charmaz, 2000, p. 520).

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

I utilized Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for establishing trustworthiness and authenticity in this qualitative study. The following sections detail the methods employed.

Credibility

Qualitative researchers can use several strategies to increase a study's credibility or internal validity. I address credibility concerns by using member checks and articulating my researcher bias.

Member Checking. Member checking or respondent validation is a common strategy for establishing credibility in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). As I analyzed interview transcripts, I shared with individual participants an overview of what I heard them share in interviews, along with my initial interpretations. This step in the process allows participants to review, make corrections, and affirm the accuracy of my interpretations.

Researcher Bias. In qualitative research, the researcher must examine their potential biases as they engage in a study. I have included a researcher positionality statement in an upcoming section to explicitly name how my personal experiences have led to and partially inform my interest in conducting this research study, as well as the biases that may emerge in light of these histories.

Transferability

External validity or transferability involves the ability to apply the findings of one study to other situations (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that transferability relies

less on the initial researcher showing how the findings can be applied in other settings, as generalizability requires in quantitative studies. Instead, transferability requires initial researchers to provide “sufficient descriptive data” to make it possible for other researchers to transfer the findings to other settings (p. 298). I have included robust participant quotes to evidence the findings. By doing so, future researchers will better assess how the findings might apply to other populations.

Dependability

Dependability, or reliability, refers to the consistency of the study findings (Merriam, 2009). Researchers establish dependability through a detailed description of the study methods, including data collection and analysis procedures. This description allows future researchers to conduct a study employing similar methods (Creswell, 2009).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which study results can be confirmed by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). To enhance the confirmability of this study, I included negative instances that contradict other observations. Additionally, I examined the data collection and analysis procedures through a data audit and identified instances of potential bias.

Ethical Considerations

A study’s trustworthiness, or credibility, is informed by the ethical manner in which a researcher conducts the study (Merriam, 2009, p. 234). Glesne (1999) urges researchers to consider not only the ethical codes that satisfy the demands of institutional review boards and accrediting bodies but also the roles a researcher may play in the lives of participants. This study provided interviewees with a consent form detailing the requested commitment to satisfy the

former concerns before participation. Additionally, pseudonyms were used for each participant to allow for confidentiality. All study data were stored using my institution's OneDrive.

However, ethical considerations in qualitative research also call upon us to consider the nature of the relationships we intend to form through the research process (Glesne, 1999). As a researcher, I was explicit in my purpose for conducting this research and articulated how I would use the findings to inform my practice moving forward. I involved participants in the data analysis process, allowing for an open, democratic approach (Scott, 1996) to the research whereby the researcher and participants negotiate the inclusion of data in the reporting of findings. I engaged in continuous communication with participants throughout the research process to establish a reciprocal relationship, sharing the benefit of the relationship between participant and researcher.

Researcher Positionality

My experiences as a student and my work in student affairs administration have informed my area of interest. Formal and informal mentorship experiences during my undergraduate career heavily influenced my ability to persist and my interest in working in this profession. Over the past twenty years, my work focused on counseling students and families as they sought to gain access to higher education, demystifying the college search and application process. I view this work as a form of mentorship with families experiencing this college-going process for the first time. I strove to find mutual benefit in these relationships. I worked to provide navigational guidance for families, and families provided me with insights from their journeys that influenced how I helped shape the organizational environment in which I was working. After years of working in the admission counseling field, I shifted into a role that allows me to shape students' orientation and transition experiences as they enter higher

education environments. My experience as an undergraduate student informed and directed my actions in these roles. My access to a caring guide and mentor proved critical in navigating the unknown college territory. My professional roles are opportunities to provide similar guidance and reassurance to others that they are welcome, capable, and valued.

My positive experience with mentorship has led to my interest in this topic and also to study design choices that have been made. I recognize that not all individuals who engage in a mentoring relationship will have the same experience that I had. While my experience may offer some insight and direction for interviews, I will listen for similarities and differences from my own past experience as participants share their experiences. I also chose to interview dyads so as to better understand both sides of the relationship rather than focusing only on a mentee's experience.

Summary

As outlined in this chapter, this study employed a grounded theory approach that contributes to the research on informal mentorship relationships between faculty and undergraduate students. Semi-structured individual interviews facilitated data collection. Through analysis of interview transcripts, findings from this study can provide recommendations for how to encourage and leverage informal mentoring relationships between undergraduate students and faculty. In the next chapter, participants will give a voice to their experience. In the final chapter, I will connect their wisdom and the current literature on mentorship.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter provides the findings of the study, which focused on the experiences of faculty and undergraduate student dyads who have engaged in an informal mentoring relationship. The study took place at an urban, Midwestern university. The purpose of the study is to understand how undergraduate students and faculty members initiate and further develop informal mentoring relationships. Additionally, the study seeks to understand the perceived benefits of the relationship from the vantage point of both dyad members.

I interviewed students and faculty independently using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews began with an opportunity for participants to describe themselves, how they have come to attend or teach at All Saints, and what experiences have led them to feel a sense of connection or belonging to the institution. Then, the interview focused on the specific relationship in which they agreed that a mentoring relationship has formed through informal means. Participants described how they first became introduced to one another, what led to the development of their relationship, and what benefits they have personally experienced from engagement with the mentor or mentee.

The chapter is organized into three parts: a description of the institution and the study participants, a review of the thematic results that emerged across participants, and an overview of each dyad's relationship. The themes were identified across student mentee and faculty mentor experiences to identify similarities and differences. I constructed the descriptions of the dyadic relationships from a combination of the two participants' accounts of their experiences with one another.

Describing All Saints University and the Study Participants Profiles

All Saints University is a private, religiously-affiliated, mission-driven, urban institution enrolling approximately 20,000 students. Mainly commuter students comprise the student population, particularly following the first year of study. Granting both undergraduate and graduate degrees, All Saints prides itself on a commitment to small class sizes and a low student-to-faculty ratio. Students enroll from all 50 states and 114 countries. Boasting a commitment to access, All Saints enrolls 35-40 percent of each incoming class as first-generation college students, the first in their immediate family to attend college.

I contacted 23 faculty members with a request to participate in this study. Thirteen of the twenty-three replied to the initial outreach. Seven faculty members expressed that while they regularly mentor undergraduate students, the recent COVID-19 pandemic had created a gap in their mentoring relationships and therefore did not meet the study's criteria (engagement within the past year). A total of six faculty mentors met the criteria and agreed to participate in the interviews. Additionally, six student mentees met the criteria and agreed to participate in the interviews. For one faculty member, Dr. Katie, I was not able to interview a mentee and will not include her in this chapter however will introduce her in the implications section of Chapter Five. Another faculty member identified two student mentees who agreed to participate in the study. During the interview, each faculty member self-identified their faculty rank, years at the institution, and academic department (Table 1). Each student identified their year in school and how they engaged with their mentor (Table 1). The names used for faculty and students in this study are pseudonyms. Participants either provided a desired pseudonym or gave the researcher permission to select a pseudonym on their behalf.

Table 1*Mentoring Dyad Descriptions*

Mentor	Faculty rank	Years at All Saints University	Academic Department	Mentee	Year in school	Engagement with Mentor
Dr. Wellfield	Tenured Full Professor	21 years	Political Science/Global Asian Studies	Claire	recent graduate, applying to graduate school	Took several courses with Wellfield and served as research assistant for 3 years
Dr. Colleen	Tenured Associate Professor	9 years	Physics	Angela	Senior	Took several courses with Colleen, engaged through academic student club
Dr. Danielle	Tenured Associate Professor, Associate Dean	10 years	Business	Ruth	Senior	Hired as student assistant by Danielle 4 months before interview
Dr. William	Tenure Track Assistant Professor	4 years	Writing	Mackenzie	recent graduate, started graduate school	Took several courses with William, conducted research together, hired as a tutor by William
Dr. Graça	Tenured Associate Professor	10 years	Environmental Science	Jennifer	Sophomore	Took one class with Graça and Graça helped connect to research project, and planning to conduct research together in upcoming months
Dr. Graça	Tenured Associate Professor	10 years	Environmental Science	Toni	recent graduate, first term graduate student both at All Saints	Took several courses with Graça, Graça served as her senior project advisor, Graça hired her to serve in a peer mentorship program as a mentor
Dr. Katie	Tenured Associate Professor	21 years	Political Science	No mentee interviewed	N/A	N/A

Faculty Mentors

Dr. Wellfield. Dr. Wellfield is a Full Professor at All Saints University. She has been on the faculty and teaching Political Science and Global Asian Studies for 21 years. She has mentored students for many years, often involving research projects or assisting with developing a book.

Dr. Colleen. Dr. Colleen is an Associate Professor with tenure at All Saints University. She has taught in the Physics department for nine years and has a history of mentoring both undergraduate and graduate students.

Dr. Danielle. Dr. Danielle is an Associate Professor with tenure and an Associate Dean in the Business College at All Saints University. She has been at All Saints University for ten years. She hires students to serve as student assistants in her work as Associate Dean.

Dr. William. Dr. William is a tenure track Assistant Professor at All Saints University. He teaches in the Writing department and works with a youth tutoring program in one of the city's neighborhoods. Dr. William has been teaching at All Saints University for four years.

Dr. Graça. Dr. Graça is an Associate Professor with tenure at All Saints University. She has been teaching in the Environmental Science department for ten years. Dr. Graça regularly mentors both undergraduate and graduate students through research projects. She recently helped establish a peer mentoring program in her academic department.

Dr. Katie. Dr. Katie is an Associate Professor with tenure at All Saints University. She has taught in the Political Science department for 21 years. Dr. Katie has often led study abroad courses, teaches capstone courses in her department, and instructs in an Inside-Out prison-exchange program. Dr. Katie has a long history of establishing mentoring relationships with individuals and larger cohorts of students. As I did not interview one of Dr. Katie's mentees, I will exclude her from the remainder of this chapter however will reintroduce her in the implications section of Chapter Five.

Student Mentors

Claire. Claire is an international student from China who graduated with a bachelor's degree from All Saints University in 2022. Claire was a focused undergraduate student who did well in her coursework. During her undergraduate years, she served as a research assistant for Dr. Wellfield for three years and assisted her in publishing a book. She is now applying to graduate school to pursue a master's or doctoral degree.

Angela. Angela is a senior at All Saints University studying Physics. She is a self-proclaimed hard-working, self-confident student who feels comfortable approaching faculty when she needs assistance. She is involved in academic clubs and has taken part in departmental colloquiums. She is applying to graduate schools for the upcoming year.

Ruth. Ruth is currently a senior studying Business at All Saints University. Ruth describes herself as an only child and a first-generation Mexican American college student. She began her college career 12 years ago, has paused her studies numerous times, attended several institutions, moved across the country, and worked full time. Ruth began working as a student assistant for Dr. Danielle four months prior to the interview for this study. She shares that a desire to be perfect has previously provided obstacles in her educational journey. Ruth plans to continue in a master's program at All Saints University.

Mackenzie. Mackenzie graduated from All Saints University in 2022 with a degree in Writing. She shares that she was a very driven student in her undergraduate courses. Mackenzie was very busy between attending classes and working at the on-campus Writing Center and felt well connected to her academic department. After graduation, she

attended graduate school for one semester before accepting a full-time job in her field of interest and discontinuing her graduate program.

Jennifer. Jennifer is the youngest participant in the study. She is a sophomore at All Saints University studying Environmental Studies, with two additional minors. Jennifer is very involved on campus, including serving as a peer mentor in a first-year seminar. She worked as a research assistant during the summer between her first and second years and is now about to engage in a research project with Dr. Graça.

Toni. Toni is a first-year graduate student at All Saints University after recently completing her undergraduate degree in Environmental Science there in 2022. As an undergraduate student, Toni participated in departmental activities as a mentor in a peer mentoring program and through research projects. Dr. Graça served as her senior capstone project faculty advisor. She is currently a graduate assistant in the Environmental Sciences department.

Participants in this study describe various reasons for initially choosing to attend or teach at All Saints University. From the student perspective, commonly named factors that led to enrollment include the location of the institution, generous financial aid packages and scholarships, academic areas of study, and small class sizes. Claire, Mackenzie, and Toni moved a great distance to attend All Saints, and each referenced the importance of the institution's financial support and the amenities located in an urban locale. Angela and Jennifer grew up nearby and shared that proximity to their families was a significant factor in their decision to attend. Ruth, Toni, and Angela referenced how their intended academic departments or majors provided opportunities for close relationships with faculty through small class sizes as an additional deciding factor.

However, when I asked student participants to describe the place to others after having been enrolled, most focused on its ethos, mission, and values as hallmarks of their experience. Claire and Ruth reflected on how the institution's mission and service ethos have come to life through their interactions with faculty. Mackenzie and Jennifer each shared how they give back to their communities by serving as mentors to others. Toni and Claire expressed a desire to find ways to show care to others as reciprocation for the mentorship they have received while at All Saints.

Unsurprisingly, the faculty participants in this study expressed how the mission drew them to All Saints or kept them teaching at the institution. Faculty referenced three components of the mission that make the place unique: a focus on teaching, diverse student body demographics, and an ethos of care. Dr. William, Dr. Colleen, Dr. Danielle, and Dr. Graça all spoke about how the priority placed on teaching at All Saints attracted them to the institution. Dr. Graça shared: "There's a primacy about teaching at All Saints. So if you do exceptional research and you're really not doing at least very good teaching, then, you know, that doesn't sort of fit who we are." Dr. Danielle specified the importance of teaching and that good teaching was also recognized: "People get recognized and praised here. Winning teaching awards here is something that is celebrated as opposed to questioned or looked down upon."

All six faculty participants referenced the demographic makeup of the student body as a representation of All Saints' mission focus and how student identities were important to their desire to continue teaching there. Dr. Graça and Dr. Colleen both reference how their academic departments prioritized creating an inclusive environment and finding strategies to welcome students with underrepresented identities in their academic fields. Dr. William, Dr. Danielle, and Dr. Graça each named the institution's priority to enroll and support first-generation students,

both first in their family to attend college and first-generation immigrants, as an important value to them as faculty. Dr. Wellfield shared how important it was for her to mentor students of color to create a pipeline of talent in her academic discipline.

Finally, the faculty described an ethos of care at the institution that provided support for themselves and called them to provide the same care for students. Dr. Colleen shared how, when she started the tenure process at All Saints, her colleagues made it clear that they assumed she would succeed. This assumption of being capable assisted her in finding success in the process and strongly influenced her approach to teaching. Similarly, Dr. Danielle shared how she approaches her teaching with the same base assumption and explicitly names that assumption in her first class each term. This ethos of care resonates with the students in this study as they describe their understanding of the mission and a commitment to serving their communities as well. An upcoming section describing each mentoring dyad includes additional participant quotes regarding their experiences at All Saints University.

Thematic Results

I present the findings of this study under four main themes that emerged throughout the coding and data analysis process. First, informal mentoring involves an element of mutual choosing. Second, establishing a shared *modus operandi* within a mentoring dyad is essential to further developing the relationship. Third, I discuss the importance of shared identities between mentor and mentee. Finally, a theme of ‘faculty as a connector’ emerged. In the next section, I will elaborate on these themes, incorporating participant quotes to substantiate.

Element of Mutual-Choosing

A central interest in this study was to understand better how mentoring relationships form without the support of a formal program structure. A common theme that emerged through

interviews focused on the importance of mentors and mentees mutually choosing one another.

When asked what leads to forming mentoring relationships with students, Dr. Danielle articulated the process this way:

To some extent, I think part of it is the element of mutual choosing. In terms of hiring Ruth and other student assistants, it is a relationship of mutual agreement. And I think that matters because you're both sussing each other out in terms of characteristics or qualities that you're looking for in the other party, right?

Dr. William added: "Each relationship is different but it's got to be reciprocal. Mentorship is work." Dr. Danielle continues to emphasize that a mentee must take the lead in determining the depth and purpose of the relationship:

I think some of this is, whether you're choosing each other or not, you have to take the cues from the presumed mentee about how much they're willing to say they want out of the relationship. It can't be the other way around. I can signal it, but until the person says, 'Hey, can we have a conversation about, you know, the future?' or whatever the equivalent is. It can't be me just mentoring if that's not the type of arrangement that person wants.

Faculty Cues in the Classroom. During the interviews, I asked faculty how they indicated to students that they are willing to extend a relationship beyond just discussing class materials. I also asked student mentees what faculty behaviors encouraged them to reach out and initiate contact with their faculty mentor. Common responses centered on concepts of openness, flexibility, and transparency.

Dr. Graça, Dr. William, and Dr. Colleen all shared similar sentiments about naming their willingness to work with students but expecting the student to make the first move. Dr. William shared how he offers to help students in his courses:

‘Hey, let me know when I can help.’ I say that to everybody, though, so they kind of have to take me up on it. I’m not playing a game. I’m just trying to be a resource, and if they need me, great, I’m there.

Dr. Graça echoes this approach to welcoming students to work with her:

So I mention it in almost every class I teach that we all do research, we all accept students so that they should look. It doesn’t mean that they have to contact me, but that they should look at faculty profiles and reach out to us. And that if they want connections, I’m happy to introduce them to different faculty.

Dr. Colleen explained how she shares her honest feelings in the classroom and believes that helps students feel comfortable approaching her:

I know that at one point, this happens almost every year because if I’m teaching the upper-level classes at some point while I’m teaching, somebody will be planning to or currently taking the [academic discipline] GRE test, which is a shit test! And I am upfront about this with the students. I’m very vocal about the fact that it is not predictive at all of success in graduate school. There is no correlation between scores on [academic discipline] GRE and success in graduate school. And as somebody who did very poorly on the [academic discipline] GRE, I had to take it twice, and was successful, got into graduate school, got a postdoc, and got a faculty position. I think it’s really important for students to hear because it is a lot of pressure, and it’s a shit test! And so I often will make comments like that around class, in the before or after time as people are

chitchatting or if they're talking about the [academic discipline] GRE. And so that kind of openness, I think, often means that students will come and talk to me about things.

Beyond faculty explicitly naming their willingness to assist students while they are in the classroom, there are myriad ways in which the student participants felt drawn to individual faculty. Toni, Mackenzie, and Angela all reference course pedagogy and faculty teaching styles as something that drew them into a relationship with their mentor.

Toni describes how Dr. Graça's teaching style excited her from the first class she took: Her classes were very well structured, in my opinion, and she tried to pack in a lot of information I could tell. She really wanted me to learn all of this material. She did a lot of like hands-on learning...and other days, we have big discussions, and she tried to have half of it be our discussion where she'd like mediate, and then the other half, she tried to teach us something in the lecture. I could just tell she was really accepting of students' ideas and wanted to form them to go further into research.

Angela similarly felt that Dr. Colleen was sincerely interested in students grasping the course concepts, and it showed in how she taught the class:

I guess that the relationship formed easily because I think her pedagogy is really solid. She allows corrections on homework, and the corrections...it isn't just like you have to look at her solutions. You have to go through and understand what you did wrong. I like that a lot of what she does is...she has many different ways of explaining concepts.

Mackenzie shared how as a shy student, Dr. William's transparency in the classroom assisted her in working up the courage to connect during office hours and ultimately form a long-term mentoring relationship with him:

Even though I was always a very engaged and excited student, I was always very nervous to go to office hours. I'm still, and especially during undergrad, would consider myself a pretty shy person, so sort of having that one-on-one interaction with the professor was like very anxiety-inducing for me. But I think specifically in that class that it was that Dr. William was very transparent. I think that he was a new tenure track professor and who was also new to All Saints and wanting to learn new things and have new experiences. So that was very encouraging. And I think, too, if I remember correctly, that he also really encouraged us to come to office hours. Not only if you have a question on a paper or something, but if you just have questions about college or research or whatever in general. So I think it was sort of like a mix of many things.

Student cues, according to faculty. I pursued questions in this study with faculty interviewees to understand what student behaviors contributed to them being open to engaging in a mentoring relationship with a particular student. Common responses generally referenced students who displayed some degree of self-confidence, showed ability in the area of study or work, and provided some interest in reciprocation of effort and communication with the mentor.

Dr. Danielle is looking for a student who displays some confidence and ability related to the position she is hiring for:

I'm listening for things that suggest that the student is confident and capable in themselves but who is looking for more. Who doesn't necessarily have it all figured out yet and is looking for opportunities to continue to grow and develop themselves.

Dr. Danielle also shares that there is a fine line between confidence and overconfidence, with the latter being a deal breaker. Dr. Graça also finds confidence helpful when establishing

relationships with mentees. She notes a distinction between talent and confidence related to the amount of labor she must contribute to the relationship:

Lack of self-confidence is different than lack of ability, and particularly when students have the ability and don't have the confidence to move on that ability, it can just take a long time to get them to a point where they move forward. I would say I have a relatively hands-off growth-oriented approach with most students, but it's pretty clear that doesn't work with every student. So with some students, a lot more direction is required, and I find that exhausting, but I can do it.

Dr. William notices those who work hard and participate in the classroom. In describing Mackenzie's performance in his class, he had this to say:

The thing I respected most about [Mackenzie] is how hard she was willing to work to make [her writing] good. I think she came to office hours maybe twice in that first class. It wasn't a lot. But it was enough for her to like know...and I think it sort of clicked where it was like, I would say to her, 'yes, you've got good ideas,' and I think what came back from her was 'yes, it's worth my time to check in with you, to be a sounding board.'

Dr. William and Dr. Danielle shared the importance of a student who reciprocates and closes the loop. As the relationship begins to develop, Dr. Danielle is looking for the following:

Some signaling of follow through, some past behavior of 'I'm going to take what we've talked about, and I'm going to go do something with it, and then I'm going to come back and let you know what happened.' And I'm not saying that every piece of advice I give is accurate or needs to be acted on, but some sense that if I'm hearing the student out and thinking through what they are signaling to me that they need help on, and I give them feedback, that it is sort of this mutually reinforcing thing.

Dr. William described how the relationships start casually. Once a student indicates they are willing to work, he will invest more: “People who stick out are people honestly who reciprocate, who want to talk turkey, and stop by.” Interestingly, as Dr. William reflected on this question, he shared how he often did not close the loop with his faculty when he was a student.

So I’d bug all my teachers, but I wouldn’t always circle back with all of them because I didn’t want to harass them. I didn’t think that they would think of it that way. I didn’t think of it as human, so to speak. I thought of it as like ‘advice machines.’ So I think I would do more of that circling back, and I’m glad that Mackenzie did so.

Dr. Wellfield’s experience was an anomaly in the group as she approached students rather than expecting students to initiate contact. Strong performance in the classroom, on exams and essays, tends to catch Dr. Wellfield’s attention. As she sees these relationships as multi-year commitments, Dr. Wellfield expressed that she can help students build their confidence if they present as academically talented with an analytical mind.

Establishing a Modus Operandi

The success of the relationships explored in this study depended on shared commitments and open communication between mentor and mentee. While the timeline and path for establishing a relationship varied by the mentoring dyad, each one eventually negotiated a *modus operandi* that felt satisfactory for both individuals. Dr. Wellfield articulated her long-term commitment to research mentees:

So for me, trying to keep somebody for three years is my modus operandi. I don’t like to waste my time with somebody for just a [term] or two because by the time they figure out what they are doing and can work independently, they’ve graduated or moved on.

Dr. Wellfield also focuses on mentoring academically gifted students and understands the importance of her mentees prioritizing their coursework. “I was very flexible in terms of the way I manage my research assistants. I don’t expect them to work 20 hours a week when they’re trying to take midterms.”

Dr. Graça served as a faculty mentor for two students in this study, and she shared how the two mentoring relationships differed: “So I would say with Jennifer, all I needed to do was mention something, and she was very engaged. So she’s been very, I mean, I would say potentially she’s been the most proactive early on.” Jennifer describes herself as very outgoing and assertive, and she is very comfortable asking faculty about opportunities to work together. Jennifer also shared that negotiating the relationship felt natural to her. Jennifer described how often they interacted: “I would say the best way to describe it is probably as needed.” This looser structure to their relationship currently meets the needs of both Dr. Graça and Jennifer.

However, Dr. Graça’s relationship with Toni developed over a more extended period. Toni took several classes with Dr. Graça, applied to work for a peer mentor program that Dr. Graça supervised, and then eventually asked Dr. Graça to serve as her senior thesis advisor. The relationship slowly developed as Toni built trust in Dr. Graça, yet the focus on the relationship involves more personal conversations than Dr. Graça has with Jennifer. Dr. Graça shared:

With Toni, I think she took the course, and then we started working together on undergraduate research but then had sort of additional contact. And I would say that I ended up talking with her about a lot of non-research-related things, particularly when we were collecting measurements in the forest.

Toni also expressed how comprehensive she finds this relationship to be in her experience:

I do think this is a relationship where we try to talk about [academic concerns and personal life stories]. And, I don't know, I guess this is like me trying to understand professional relationships. I do like to learn from her in every facet. I do admire her family life, especially doing what I want to be doing. I do feel like I look up to them in every way, and I try to ask her about her family life, and she asks me about mine a little. I feel like we do try to see each other's lives and help each other in every way.

Across each of these relationships, Dr. Graça named the importance of open communication. "Being very clear about what I can help with...and what I couldn't...I think, you know, made it so that we both understood going in how this collaboration would work."

Once students and faculty initiated their relationships, a common theme as a factor in their development and increased depth was the introduction of structure. For Dr. Danielle, Ruth, Dr. Wellfield, and Claire, employment status provided structure from the onset. Dr. Danielle and Ruth referenced the importance of weekly check-in meetings to assess work product and continue to negotiate their relationship. Ruth shared how others have helped her to realize how special her access to Dr. Danielle is:

People tell me how lucky I am to get to see [Dr. Danielle] every week. It's when it really hits me that she is in a pretty powerful position, and I get to see her on a weekly basis. I have a standing appointment with her on Thursdays to check in, so yeah, I guess I'm pretty lucky.

Similarly, Dr. Graça names the importance of weekly check-in meetings with her mentees to maintain progress:

Once these relationships started, we've met consistently, and you know, even if we're just doing a quick check-in, we'd have weekly meetings to, in part, part of the reason for

this is I found that if we don't have weekly meetings, it means that one or both of us will deprioritize the work.

For Dr. Wellfield and Claire, much of their initial interactions occurred when Dr. Wellfield was on research leave and during the COVID-19 pandemic when the campus was closed. Claire shared how she and Dr. Wellfield relied much more heavily on email communication and written feedback than meeting in person during that time, and it proved challenging for her:

The first year I worked for her, she was on research leave. So basically, we communicated with each other through email and FaceTime. It's quite difficult to hold some face-to-face conversations, and that's why the beginning of my work experience was pretty challenging. I couldn't...or it was difficult to hear or receive any real-time comments from her at the beginning.

As more time passed, Claire noted that the relationship deepened in part due to the amount of advice and personal encouragement she received from Dr. Wellfield. Claire shared that personal support started during a time when she was struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic:

I think it was during the pandemic time...we were not only talking about our work but also talking about our personal lives...and also she gave me a lot of advice for my academic life because she really wanted me to focus on my academics and to do it well. As she said that my academic work is the priority, and even it's more important than working for her. So, I felt it was really warm and sweet.

Working collaboratively on a research project provided the structure for developing the relationship between Dr. William and Mackenzie. Mackenzie described how she and Dr. William needed to work together to negotiate the research project application process:

The application process was...I had to have someone sponsor the project. I had to work with a professor on it. And for the type of research we were doing, we had to have our IRB approval stuff sort of in the works as we were applying to show the seriousness of it. So during the application process, [Dr. William and I] had to do pre-work for the application and then do the application together. And then [Dr. William] sort of supervised the project after that.

Of the six student mentees interviewed, Ruth, Mackenzie, Toni, and Claire described themselves as shy or reserved. Interestingly, these four students established more structure within their relationship with their mentors. Conversely, Jennifer and Angela were the two mentees who expressed comfort with asking for what they needed and approaching faculty members in formal and informal settings. Their relationships with a mentor were less structured and involved less consistent communication than the previous four mentees. Nevertheless, all six referenced the beneficial nature of being in a mentoring relationship.

Importance of Shared Identities

Past literature reviews explore how mentoring relationships come to form and, specifically, how social identities affect the development of a relationship. As part of this study, participants often referenced the importance of shared identities between themselves and their mentor or mentee. Ruth believes her academic interests matched Dr. Danielle's research interests which helped facilitate their relationships forming to resemble mentorship rather than merely supervision. Claire believed that her racial identity played a role in being selected by Dr. Wellfield to work on a research project. Dr. Wellfield, however, named that personality traits attract her attention when identifying potential mentees: "I'm very analytical, so I'm looking for

people who are like, you know, a younger version of me because I didn't really have a lot of mentorship."

Angela and Toni both name how shared gender identity played a role in their mentor-mentee relationship forming. Angela described the role of gender in connecting with her mentor:

I think it's important that [Dr. Colleen]'s a woman. Not in the sense that...like I've never felt put down because of my gender in Physics at all, but I think that it's important. I think it's sometimes easier for women to connect with each other, and so that probably helps in terms of how closely we can connect.

For Toni, both gender and proximity in age also played a role in her relationship forming with Dr. Graça.

It is partially because [Dr. Graça] is the most similar to me in how we look. She's a woman. I'm a woman. And she's closest in age to me. I just feel like I have the most in common with her, and she's like the closest adult figure to what I aspire to next in life. Mackenzie also shared that age played a role in how her relationship with Dr. William varied from other relationships with peers, parents, or previous mentors:

It's really important to have a mentor that's like ten to fifteen years older than you because they have that ten to fifteen extra years of experience, but they're not so far removed from yourself that they can still relate to you and give you direct advice to what you're experiencing as well. Because I think the mentors I had in my life prior to that were like soccer coaches and high school teachers, and they were all a bit older. I had never had someone who was both a mentor and also closer to me in age in that way. So I think that was definitely part of the appeal.

Faculty as Connectors

All six student participants in this study referenced how their relationship with their mentor connected them to additional opportunities. For Angela, Dr. Colleen increased her awareness of events related to her major: “Dr. Colleen always provided...like if there’s ever an opportunity to go hear a talk nearby or something like that, she tries to make people aware of it.” Similarly, Claire shared how Dr. Wellfield introduced her to other professors and attended campus events with her. Ruth also referenced the benefit of meeting and working collaboratively with other faculty through projects that Dr. Danielle assigned to her:

Over the summer, Dr. Danielle set up a meeting to introduce me to two professors so that we could connect on college-wide event planning efforts. From that short conversation blossomed the idea for a signature series, an event that would take place at the end of every quarter as part of the updated business curriculum. With the help of our college’s events person, we worked nonstop to shape a one-of-a-kind event for 500 students.

For Jennifer, Toni, and Mackenzie, the relationship with their mentor assisted them in procuring research and employment opportunities.

However, several faculty mentors named that sometimes their role as a mentor is to help a student find a better fit with another mentor who can support them differently. Dr. Graça and Dr. Danielle name that with informal mentorship, a match is only sometimes guaranteed, and students should approach this process of finding a mentor with that understanding. Dr. Danielle states:

I feel strongly about this sort of early and often approach is I think that not every attempt to engage in informal mentoring is going to result in a successful outcome. But I don’t think that that is a signal that we stop investing in programs about matching students to

potential mentors, whether peer mentors or professional mentors. Because it does take time and that matching of the right set at the right point in time, there's a lot that can go into that matching process. But it's not always going to be a really good fit, and when it's not, the beauty is we say, 'Okay, well then, let's find you someone else who might be a better fit.' It's not a sign that these matching programs or processes are futile. We can refine the criteria we're looking for and continue trying.

Dr. Colleen discussed mentor-mentee mismatch with a past mentee and how beneficial it was to help the mentee connect with another faculty member instead who was more aligned with the student's interests and needs. "I learned about where my strengths lie, and where they don't, and where I need to call on a colleague to provide mentoring that I can't provide." She also discussed the concept of co-mentorship:

In my larger research collaborations, I do a lot of co-mentoring of other people's graduate students as well. And my colleague, in particular, really models for me this idea that no one person is going to be the mentor that you have. That's not how it was for me, and there are very few people for whom...there are people for whom they might think that's the case, but that's not actually how...like, when you try to expect one person to fulfill all of your emotional needs, bad things happen. So I don't expect that I'm going to be the only mentor in the students' lives. And so learning from them, where do I need to find other people who can complement me?

Overview of the Mentor-Mentee Dyad Relationships

Dyad 1: Dr. Wellfield and Claire

Claire chose to attend All Saints as an undergraduate student after receiving a scholarship which helped alleviate the financial burdens associated with attending college. She also shared,

“I felt like All Saints really cares about students.” During her first term at All Saints, Claire contemplated transferring to another institution with more academic prestige. As an international student from China, Claire felt pressure to attend a college with an esteemed academic reputation. However, after enrolling in one of Dr. Wellfield’s courses during her first term, she received an email from Dr. Wellfield asking if she would be interested in working on a research project together. Claire shared how that outreach ultimately helped her decide to remain at All Saints: “I received the email from Dr. Wellfield to ask me to work for her...it was an encouragement because I never really thought I would receive an offer to work on campus.”

When asked why she felt she was offered this research opportunity, Claire stated that the main reasons were “I got a very high grade for my midterm exams” and “I’m Chinese. I knew previously [Dr. Wellfield] had a Chinese student who did very good work for her, so she probably wanted to look for another Chinese student to help her finish the research for the book.” Dr. Wellfield’s research project at the time focused on East Asian medicines.

Dr. Wellfield has taught at All Saints for 21 years and earned the full professor rank. Approximately six years ago, Dr. Wellfield received an endowed professorship which includes a small stipend and involves service work outside of teaching. She often uses this stipend as a way to compensate student research assistants. Dr. Wellfield was first introduced to Claire as a first-year student in one of her courses. Dr. Wellfield affirms the reasons Claire mentions for being selected for the research assistant role:

She was a freshman when I started the major research and write-up for [a] project. Claire was so brilliant. I hired her on the spot after she was a freshman who never said one word in my course. I had no idea how brilliant she was. She never said anything. I would call on her, and she would just freeze up. And then, she took the midterm, which is pretty

rigorous. She submitted the most analytically sophisticated essay. And so she was probably 19 at the time...I mean very young. So a light bulb went off in my head, and I basically, after I distributed the midterm grades, I took her aside, and I said, 'you know, just wondering if you might want to be a research assistant?'

Dr. Wellfield shares that student racial and ethnic identities do play a role in her outreach as well:

I try to mentor students of color whenever possible. I find that students who have a non-White dominant life experience are more adaptable and flexible in times of adversity. So they've lived a life where they've had to kind of adapt to this majority discourse, institutional framework, structural racism around them, and they've managed to survive through grit and perseverance, and that's the other thing I look for. So those are character traits that I have, grit and perseverance. And so I look for that.

Claire continued as Dr. Wellfield's research assistant for the next three years. Dr.

Wellfield refers to this as her *modus operandi* regarding student research assistants:

Once I hire somebody, unless they quit, graduate early, or it's just a terrible fit for them...I try to keep them with me for three years. Because really, the first year is them figuring out how to do research. And then you're really not getting a return on the investment of the mentoring time until the second year. And then the third year, they're so independent that now they're coming up with ideas that are so serendipitous and things you're not thinking about.

Both Dr. Wellfield and Claire referenced the importance of regular communication, both via email and in-person interactions, and also flexibility. Claire discussed the importance of receiving feedback:

At the end of the day, I sent my work summary, and then [Dr. Wellfield] sent feedback back to me. I read the feedback carefully and avoided making the same mistakes next time. If [Dr. Wellfield] sent me very positive feedback, I would become confident because I knew if I could handle this kind of challenging work this time, then I could handle the same challenging work next time.

Repeatedly, Dr. Wellfield underscored the importance of the students prioritizing their academic success. Dr. Wellfield states, “I was very flexible in terms of the way I manage my research assistants. I don’t expect them to be working 20 hours a week when they’re trying to take midterms.” She also explicitly named a motive of wanting to nurture the next generation of scholars in her field of study, and to do so, she needed to encourage their excellence in the classroom.

Claire referenced many benefits of engaging in this relationship with Dr. Wellfield. First, this mentoring relationship assisted her in building relationships and engaging more on campus. Claire referenced the importance of respect and deference in her culture and how this relationship provided her with a new understanding of how she might interact with faculty:

In Chinese culture, teachers are very far away from students—at least for me. Students should respect them and usually not build private relationships outside the class. But this mentorship really helped me to know professors...and that I can have some connections with professors.

Claire also referenced knowing more about university activities and institutional values due to this relationship.

Additionally, Claire shared how Dr. Wellfield assisted her in learning to be a professional and how to handle difficulties. Once after making a mistake, she shared how helpful it was when

Dr. Wellfield consoled her: “let’s just take a cup of tea and take a deep breath, then we’ll deal with this mistake. It’s done.” Another time when she was trying to travel home but faced a challenge due to COVID-19, Dr. Wellfield offered to help her figure out a plan. Claire named the importance of this kindness: “When you have no one...when you are struggling at that time, and someone can help you...it made me feel so lucky!”

This advice and guidance also informed Claire’s academic path and future career aspirations. She shared that the relationship “really makes me realize I can do a Master’s program because my academic skills have been improved profoundly due to the research assistance experience. I’m confident I’m prepared for a future Master’s program or for the Ph.D.” Dr. Wellfield is currently assisting Claire by writing recommendation letters for her graduate school applications. Claire beamed with pride as she shared: “When I am applying for graduate school, she sent me lots of suggestions and advice, as well as encouragement. She said, ‘you are deserving!’”

Dr. Wellfield also reported benefits from this mentoring relationship: “My students listen to me. They go out of their way to seek me out to ask me for advice. It’s this sense of satisfaction of hopefully steering them in the right direction.” Ultimately, another benefit of serving as a mentor is that it presents opportunities to develop the next generation of scholars in her field. Dr. Wellfield shared that she remains in touch with some past mentees who graduated more than a decade ago.

Dyad 2: Dr. Colleen and Angela

Angela is a senior who chose to attend All Saints due to the institution’s proximity to her family, small class sizes, and the strength of her academic major. Angela considers herself a hardworking student who feels comfortable asking for help when needed. “I’ve never been a

very self-conscious person when it comes to asking people things very outright, and as long as I'm respectful, I don't see the problem in asking people questions." Angela describes encountering Dr. Colleen in three consecutive classes during her junior year. She expressed appreciation for how Dr. Colleen instructed the courses, which led to eventually forming a mentoring relationship:

I guess the relationship formed easily because I think her pedagogy is really solid. She allows corrections on homework, and the corrections...it isn't just like you have to look at her solutions. You have to go through and understand what you did wrong. I like that...she has many different ways of explaining concepts.

Beyond the classroom, Angela also interacted with Dr. Colleen after a departmental colloquium. In the small academic department of her major, Angela shared that she knows most of the professors by name. However, she expresses feeling closer to Dr. Colleen than others: "When I talk to her, it's not like I have to come across any certain way. I feel comfortable talking with her just person to person." She explains that the relationship developed gradually, influenced by her excitement to learn more from Dr. Colleen in courses: "I always enjoyed coming to her classes and...it wasn't a nuisance. It wasn't a schlep. It was just, 'oh, well, I'm excited to go and learn more about this today.'"

Dr. Colleen is an associate professor with tenure at All Saints and has been on the faculty for nine years. She found All Saints attractive due to the location and proximity to family, her academic department's reputation, the institution's religious affiliation, and the mission. Dr. Colleen names that a part of that mission is a strong focus on teaching:

All Saints is predominantly still a teaching institution, and that was something that was really important for me. The fact that it was tenure track, the fact that there was a

research component, even though I didn't have to get grants and things like that, and also it was a small enough department where I felt like I could have more one-on-one relationships with people. But the focus was on teaching. There was really a value for teaching.

According to Dr. Colleen, several hallmarks of her academic department help shape her teaching approach. First, departmental faculty spend significant time focusing on active engagement strategies in the classroom. She expresses how unusual it is for an institution the size of All Saints to have such a level of buy-in for this pedagogical priority. As referenced above, Angela also voiced appreciation for this teaching approach. Second, there is a shared value of pastoral care for students. "This idea that [departmental faculty colleagues] want to take care of our undergraduates. We want to do that pastoral care. And we do it in different ways." Beyond the classroom, faculty show this care through organizing colloquiums and research days, advising student organizations, and facilitating GRE prep courses. Finally, the department encourages a supportive environment that assumes everyone can succeed. In describing her tenure process, Dr. Colleen shared:

When I got to All Saints, my sense was that everybody assumed that I would be successful...and that being the base assumption freed up a lot of space for me to actually be successful. The fact that I didn't have to be proving myself...people assumed that I would be successful, and I would have to prove the opposite. It reduced the stress enough that it made it easier to actually be successful because I wasn't constantly worrying about whether or not I was doing well. I got good feedback.

Dr. Colleen first remembers encountering Angela as a freshman. Someone had recommended they connect to discuss being a woman in [the academic field]. Dr. Colleen

remembers it being a “really nice conversation,” but they didn’t formally interact again until Angela’s junior year when she took three courses with Dr. Colleen. Dr. Colleen reflected on what transpired between them:

Angela, as a student, is somebody who is highly motivated. So she was one of the few that would haunt my office hours and make sure that she knew and talked to me after class. Most of it was around class, but when she was starting to look at research experiences for the summer, she had reached out about doing letters of recommendation.

It was through the process of procuring recommendation letters that the relationship opened up slightly. Then, during Angela’s senior year, even though she was not in any of Dr. Colleen’s courses, they met to discuss graduate school and process a controversial event in the department.

Unlike some of the other relationships in this study, Dr. Colleen and Angela had less structure to their relationship. The regularity of checking in with one another varied from term to term. Nevertheless, both could articulate the benefits gained from being in a relationship with one another.

Angela named the benefits of learning about graduate school and being able to bring her whole self into her area of study. “Having that sort of connection [with Dr. Colleen], I feel like it makes being in [academic major] easier because you can’t separate something that you’re studying from your emotions entirely. And it’s not even an idea to try and do that.” Angela also shared that feeling more comfortable interacting with faculty due to this relationship led her to consider initiating an event for faculty and students to come together and discuss their [academic major] and personal interests.

Dr. Colleen names several benefits of engaging in mentoring relationships as well. First, she shared that she sees more student mentees' growth.

The benefit to me is that I get to see them. I get to see more of them than I just get to see in the classroom. It's hard for students to bring their whole selves to the classroom for a lot of reasons. But the more that I can, either through classes and the buffer around classes and the interaction in class, allow space for people to bring their whole selves, it means that I get to see them. I like people, and I like stories. So getting to see their stories is incredible.

She names how these relationships are reciprocal and lead to her learning.

I learn from them in the classroom, absolutely no question. This is one of the reasons why I love active engagement is because I get to learn from them as much as they get to learn from me. But also, in the mentoring relationship, I learn not just about them but I also learn about me. It helps me be a better teacher. It helps me be better at my job, but it also helps me learn about myself and integrate my own stuff better.

Dyad 3: Dr. Danielle and Ruth

Ruth's college journey had been circuitous since she first started taking classes in 2010. After attending several institutions, moving across the country, and working in service industries, Ruth started taking classes at All Saints at 28 years old. She arrived armed with lots of learning about herself, the world of work, and what she wanted to contribute with her degree. "I had finally realized a lot of bad experiences led me to pursue [my academic field]. What I needed was an advocate in so many of my jobs. I'm going to be that person for other people." A self-proclaimed perfectionist, Ruth shared that she is a very good student but had failed some classes due to a lack of confidence in her ability to do well. Upon joining All Saints, Ruth was

introduced to a network of resources to assist her in finding success: “All Saints is the only place that gave me the support system to succeed because I felt that I could connect with professors on a personal level.”

One of those professors helped connect Ruth to Dr. Danielle. After reading one of Ruth’s reflection essays for his class, he insisted on introducing Ruth to Dr. Danielle. Ruth was hesitant initially as she did not know who Dr. Danielle was nor why this professor was so adamant that they met. Eventually, he forwarded Ruth a job posting to serve as a student assistant for Dr. Danielle. Ruth applied, and Dr. Danielle hired her within days. When asked why she thought this professor was so intent on being a connector, Ruth replied: “If I had to guess, it would probably be Dr. Danielle’s research interests, and making sure the workplace is fair reminded him of my research interests. The things that I listed were pretty much identical to hers.”

Dr. Danielle is an associate professor with tenure at All Saints and serves as an associate dean for student success for her college. Similar to other faculty in this study, Dr. Danielle desired to work at an institution that prioritized teaching excellence:

One of the reasons why I was drawn to All Saints is because I really do care about teaching excellence in addition to research scholarship. And so, finding a place that was going to value both was really important to me. People who are invested in teaching and invested in developing students get recognized and praised here. Winning teaching awards here is something that is celebrated as opposed to questioned or looked down upon.

Engaging with students in the classroom helps Dr. Danielle feel connected to the community. Dr. Danielle approaches her teaching and mentoring with the assumption that all students should have an opportunity to succeed. She articulates a straightforward approach when

teaching students that begin with showing students that she cares about them and offering flexibility where she can:

I certainly see it as my responsibility to convey to [students] that I care about them, and I care about their success. And if there's anything going on in their world that is preventing them from doing as well as they want that I am happy to listen. When things happen to students that are beyond their control, they just need some consideration and accommodation when life happens. So when that's within the walls of my classroom, because that's the space that I think I can control in terms of just being more than a decent human being, but at minimum, a considerate human being.

Her approach also involves establishing shared expectations of one other in the classroom:

I start the first day [of class] by effectively trying to establish the things that I expect of [students]. I expect you to come to class prepared. I expect you to be on time, emergencies notwithstanding. Hand in your work. I expect you to come prepared and ready to engage. If you do that, you'll successfully pass this class. On the flip side, I share what they can expect of me. You can expect me to be responsive when you reach out. You can expect me to grade things in a timely fashion. You can expect feedback from me on what's working and what's not. And if I'm not upholding my end of the bargain, I expect you to call me out on it. Because I will reach out to you, the student, if I see some things that are not coming together on your end. I expect it to be an engaged environment. And then I say, 'is that something you want? Do you want to be here?'

Finally, her approach to teaching includes providing opportunities to try again if students struggle:

I also give every student something called an ‘oops token.’ So if they screw up through fault of their own, or no fault of their own, no questions asked, they can have a redo on something. Hand something in late, redo it because they totally miss the mark, and they don’t have to tell me why they need to use this. But they can.

Dr. Danielle’s approach to supervision, and thereby mentorship, follow a similar playbook. When asked to describe her understanding of the role of a mentor, Dr. Danielle shared:

A mentor should be someone who is there to be supportive with judgment that is well positioned, not judgment for judgment’s sake, but judgment that is food for thought in terms of helping the mentee think through things in ways that maybe they aren’t thinking through at present. I don’t have to agree with every decision that my mentee makes. But I do want them to know that I’m in their corner, and I’m going to listen and be supportive and help them talk through or think through things that may be on their mind. From the perspective of someone who is not a family member, is not a friend, whose connection is built on a very different foundation than some of those other relationships.

When Dr. Danielle is interviewing to hire a student assistant, she has an idea of who might be a good match for her style of supervision and guidance.

I’m listening for things that suggest that the student is confident and capable in themselves but who is looking for more. Who doesn’t necessarily have it all figured out yet and is looking for opportunities to continue to grow and develop themselves. Also, a level of maturity that is not necessarily defined by someone’s age or year in school but simply a perspective in terms of their willingness to display a level of professionalism and maturity that suggests we can have a really honest conversation about the future and areas for growth and development. And then I think the last piece is some signaling of

follow through, some past behavior of ‘I’m going to take what we’ve talked about and I’m going to go do something with it and then I’m going to come back and let you know what happened.’

However, Dr. Danielle is also very aware that relationships resembling mentoring require an element of “mutual choosing,” and she articulates that the mentee must take the lead:

You have to take the cues from the presumed mentee about how much they’re willing to say they want out of the relationship. It can’t be the other way around. I can signal it, but until the person says, ‘Hey, can we have a conversation about the future?’ or whatever the equivalent is, it can’t be me just mentoring if that’s not the type of arrangement that person wants.

At the time of sitting down for this interview, Ruth had worked for Dr. Danielle for four months. Almost immediately upon starting this job, Ruth named how different this felt from past employment experiences:

Dr. Danielle’s thoughtfulness and fairness as a leader has been evident since the beginning. At first, it was difficult to hide my surprise whenever she was considerate about my time or feelings because it was the complete opposite of my previous work experiences. Those tiny moments of being treated fairly were so new to me.

Ruth articulates that how Dr. Danielle shows up as a supervisor has made her feel like mentorship is taking place in this relationship. Ruth names a balance of trust, independence, and collaboration when working on projects:

When I was giving suggestions or she was asking my opinion, that’s when it began to feel like I’m not just here to do as I’m told. I feel like she genuinely cares about my opinion and will actively take it into consideration.

Ruth shares that she has access to Dr. Danielle regularly to check in and consult on work and classes:

When I've said, 'I'm having trouble kind of working through this in this class,' [Dr. Danielle]'s like, 'Okay, how can I help you work through it?' She's just always trying to figure out if there are barriers she can help knock down or help me build the skills to knock them down myself.

Dr. Danielle also views this relationship as special in these early months. In describing the relationship that has been forming with Ruth, Dr. Danielle shares, "I care about her success, and I care about her future. She is also clearly invested in her development as a professional, and so we've been able to develop a rapport." This rapport motivates Dr. Danielle to contribute more than is required as a supervisor. "It is about an enhanced level of caring and investment and wanting to better understand where she wants to go in the future and how the work she's doing right now can help her get there." There is also honesty and vulnerability centered in this relationship. As Dr. Danielle names:

If I want to signal that it's okay for my mentee to be vulnerable with me, then to some extent, I need to be able to display some of that vulnerability and show that when I have things going on outside of work that are getting in the way of me doing what I said I would do, I'm clear about that. When I make mistakes, and it's my fault, I want to be able to own that and sort of say, 'I am not infallible either, and I screwed this up, and I'm going to do what I can to make it right.'

Ruth named several benefits that have come out of this relationship already. First, she shared a sense of accomplishment and pride from being able to help other people through her role in Dr. Danielle's office. After assisting with planning an event for other students, Ruth

shared: “It just felt like I was contributing to something important and investing in others...those moments have been some of the best ones and have made it clear that I’m in a good place.” She also clearly articulates how these new relationships have also helped her find more confidence and a sense of purpose:

It gave me such an incredible amount of purpose and confidence having these relationships where people know me and want to know what’s going on in my life. That makes me want to succeed. I feel like I can do anything, and that’s been a really new experience. As someone that could list all the things I couldn’t do before, now I’m a little bit less quick to do so. That’s been nice.

Dr. Danielle also names the benefits that have come out of this relationship. Similar to other faculty, she feels great pride in being able to offer new opportunities to Ruth and witness her growth:

Through a vehicle that you could construe as narrowly as an hourly student assistant position to one that has the potential to be so very much more...I do see her. I do see her talents. I see her capabilities. I see her drive. I see all of those pieces. And so this is obviously quite a bit more than simply an employment relationship in that regard. And I can totally relate to wanting to be in a role that allows you to thrive, not just kind of make it through but truly thrive. And so I am nothing but grateful that our paths crossed at the time they did.

Another benefit from relationships with students like Ruth and her work as an Associate Dean is that Dr. Danielle has identified a slightly shifted focus and priority for her teaching. She names that in the context of teaching and finding opportunities to be in the classroom, she is considering how she “can get in front of more students who are in a slightly more formative

stage of their growth and development to see if we can make some of the same things happen.” So moving forward, she will consider shifting to teach more undergraduate rather than graduate courses in her academic department.

Dyad 4: Dr. William and Mackenzie

Mackenzie grew up in a college town in the Midwest, and when it was time to select a college, she decided she wanted a new environment. So the combination of All Saints’ location in an urban environment and a generous financial aid package led her to attend. Mackenzie shared that she has always been a good student and was excited to explore the academic options offered at All Saints. Her academic path shifted several times in the first few years: “Trying on different hats while I was an undergraduate student was good for me. I definitely needed to sort of explore, to figure out what would be best.” Small class sizes and a tight-knit academic community based in her major department helped Mackenzie feel connected. Mackenzie was a very driven, busy undergraduate student, which led her to many opportunities that shaped her decisions post-college.

As a junior, Mackenzie took one of Dr. William’s classes, a requirement for her major. The course included a final research project that sparked Mackenzie’s interest. She approached Dr. William during office hours at the end of the term to inquire if there might be ways for her to continue with more research, and he introduced her to a summer undergraduate research grant. Together, Mackenzie and Dr. William crafted an application, and once the grant was received, Dr. William served as Mackenzie’s supervisor for the summer project. After that summer project concluded, Mackenzie went on to take more classes taught by Dr. William. “I took other classes with him because I enjoyed working with him and this teaching style,” she shared.

Dr. William is a fifth-year tenure track assistant professor at All Saints. Dr. William chose to teach at All Saints for several reasons. First, the focus of his academic department and future colleagues provided him with a community. “Part of what attracted me was that there were people already doing what I do. So that made it a lot easier to say, ‘Okay, good. I can be one of many.’” Dr. William also shared that the urban location and proximity to family and friends were another selling point. Finally, having attended private, religiously affiliated schools growing up, the mission of All Saints to serve a diverse student body was a draw. “I talk a lot about the efforts to get first-generation students and students from low-income backgrounds to come and get a degree. I think that really matters to me, and that’s something that All Saints stands for.”

Dr. William recalls his experience with the first class he taught Mackenzie and what made him notice her in the class:

She was always raising her hand, always interacting. She was great with eye contact. She would always make eye contact and tell me what she was thinking. That was super helpful for me as I was trying to refine that class. The thing I respected most about her is how hard she was willing to work to make [her work] good. It wasn’t sort of this grade grubbing where it’s like, ‘How do I revise this to get more points.’ Instead, it was like, ‘What do you think of this idea? What do you think of that idea?’

Dr. William remembered that Mackenzie only attended office hours once or twice that term. However, those visits were enough for him to share with Mackenzie that he thought she had good ideas. “I think what came back from her was, ‘yes, it’s worth my time to check in with you, to be a sounding board.’ I think that’s really where we kind of bonded.”

Based on their experiences in those classes and the summer research project, Dr. William invited Mackenzie to work with him on a tutoring project in a local neighborhood in the city.

Both Mackenzie and Dr. William reference how this sequence of engagements helped to deepen their relationship. Mackenzie referenced how transparent Dr. William was in the classroom.

Dr. William shared that relationships with students usually start casually, and then once a student indicates that they are willing and interested in working together, he will give more of himself.

Dr. William describes how this approach plays out in the classroom:

I'm like, 'Hey, let me know when I can help.' I say that to everybody, though, so they kind of have to take me up on it. I'm not playing a game. I'm just trying to be a resource, and if they need me, I'm there.

Dr. William shared that Mackenzie accepted that offer:

I think Mackenzie is especially kind but also savvy. She kind of knew, 'Okay, this guy's willing to help me. I can trust him.' And I feel the same way about her. I think she's willing to work hard, and I'm happy to sign off to be her supervisor.

Mackenzie also shared that age played a role in how this mentorship varied from other relationships with peers, parents, or previous mentors:

It's really important to have a mentor that's like ten to fifteen years older than you because they have that 10 to 15 extra years of experience, but they're not so far removed from yourself that they can still relate to you and give you direct advice to what you're experiencing as well. Because I think the mentors I had in my life prior to that were like soccer coaches and high school teachers, and they were all a bit older. I had never had someone who was both a mentor and also closer to me in age in that way. So I think that was definitely part of the appeal.

Mackenzie named how this relationship benefited her by providing support that her family may not have been able to provide:

I think, for me specifically, it was really helpful and really important to have Dr. William as a mentor because both of my parents went to college, but they sort of did nontraditional routes of getting there. So a lot of the stuff I was doing was new to me, and I didn't necessarily have a built-in support system already to figure those things out. So once we met and got connected and that mentor relationship was sort of established, it was really helpful to be able to ask him, 'How do I apply for grad school and where do I even start? How do I ask for a letter of recommendation? How do I pursue research and what does that even mean professionally?' So it was a really special, unique, important relationship for me to have someone outside of my family and outside my personal life who had a lot of this knowledge that I didn't necessarily have access to.

Mackenzie also shared how this mentoring relationship increased her confidence in several areas. First, she is more confident in establishing relationships with supervisors and other faculty after her experience working with Dr. William. Second, she built more confidence regarding her future career decisions:

I knew what interests I had and what values I had, and what my aspirations were, but I just didn't know about many jobs. Through Dr. William, I had so much exposure to what sort of jobs exist for people who like to write and do research and read. So just broadening my scope of what's possible and things that I could aspire to do after graduation was so incredibly valuable and helped a lot with my confidence.

Finally, Mackenzie shared that through this mentoring relationship with Dr. William, she now has a higher propensity to become a mentor to others. "I think feeling the value and knowing the value of my mentoring relationship, I am so happy and joyous to give that to someone else and to have that back and forth with someone."

Dr. William indicated that while mentoring students is not formally rewarded in the tenure process, the fringe benefits are pretty great. Dr. William shares that this relationship with Mackenzie “helped me understand how powerful teaching and mentoring can be.” Lessons learned through the process of mentoring Mackenzie has informed his teaching practices. “When I lesson plan, I think, ‘Okay, what about the Mackenzie’s? How do I reach the high-achieving student? What do I do to give them a good experience?’ I think that’s helped me grow a lot as a teacher.” It has also provided Dr. William with a sense of pride for the work they have accomplished together. “[Working with Mackenzie] was just so rewarding. She’s asking for feedback, asking for ideas, and I felt like I can be the best version of myself with her.”

Dyad 5: Dr. Graça and Jennifer

Jennifer is a sophomore honors student at All Saints. She chose to attend All Saints because of the campus location and proximity to her family. Jennifer considers herself an ambitious student and has become involved on campus through research opportunities, living on campus, and serving as a peer mentor in a first-year seminar. Jennifer first engaged with Dr. Graça as a faculty advisor during her first year when she was trying to decide between two programs of study. Jennifer then enrolled in a class taught by Dr. Graça towards the end of her first year.

Self-described as an outgoing and assertive student, Jennifer approached Dr. Graça after class one day to inquire about research opportunities. Dr. Graça helped Jennifer secure a summer research position and plans to supervise Jennifer for a future research project. Currently, Jennifer describes the regularity of their interactions as “as needed.” Their conversations generally focus on class selection, major and minor discernment, and research, and they are just now considering options for post-graduate plans. In Jennifer’s words,

[The relationship with Dr. Graça] feels like a much deeper and longer kind of relationship. I'd say my relationship with most of the faculty here is pretty conditional on me taking a class with them, and for the most part, it kind of ends at the end of the class. With Dr. Graça, we talk much more frequently and work more closely together.

Jennifer shared that analyzing the relationship makes it clear that mentorship is taking place, yet she notes that it is implied rather than explicit. "I think it has to do with the inception of the relationship. It was much more of an organic thing as opposed to me maybe applying for a mentee position." Nevertheless, some benefits have already emerged from this relationship. Jennifer names that this relationship with Dr. Graça has introduced career advice and helped her navigate her time at All Saints. Additionally, it has introduced her to several research opportunities allowing her to do things she is genuinely interested in and that also serve to enhance her resume.

Dr. Graça is an Associate Professor at All Saints and has taught for over 10 years. Dr. Graça chooses to teach at All Saints for several reasons. First, her husband is also on the faculty, so she had some familiarity with the academic department before being hired. Second, she shared that she has previously benefited from smaller feeling institutions that value mentoring, and she finds that at All Saints. Third, the institution's diverse student population and mission-centric nature speak to her. "[All Saints'] focus on first-generation college students and getting students into different disciplines who might not already be the majority, I find very important." Finally, All Saints' primary focus on teaching is enticement:

I call it a T1 institution because R1 is a research-first institution. So, I call us a teaching-first institution. There's a primacy about teaching at All Saints, so if you do exceptional

research and you're really not doing at least very good teaching, then that doesn't fit who we are.

Dr. Graça finds connection at All Saints through her academic department, as well as the students she has the opportunity to teach:

Watching students struggle and overcome obstacles that weren't there for me can really be motivating to continue to create opportunities and connect students with research and internships. So I think that there's a sense that the teaching and research and even service are meaningful at All Saints because they are moving toward a vision of a more inclusive scientific community in conservation and environmental science. Training future scientists who are able to navigate complex problems I find rewarding.

Conducting research is required for students in her academic department who are receiving a Bachelor of Science degree. Because of this, Dr. Graça notes that supervising students on research can lead to easy mentorship. As an instructor, Dr. Graça encourages students to reach out and make connections with faculty and offers to help serve as a connector between students and faculty:

I mention it in almost every class I teach that [faculty in the academic department] all do research, we all accept students, so they should look. It doesn't mean that they have to contact me, but that they should look at faculty profiles and reach out to us. And if they want connections, I'm happy to introduce them to different faculty.

An invitation extended to one of her courses is how Dr. Graça began to work more closely with Jennifer. In describing her interactions with Jennifer, Dr. Graça affirms that Jennifer is an assertive, take-charge student. "I met [Jennifer] as a freshman in class, and anytime I talked about an opportunity, she would come up after class, ask about that opportunity, and send me

multiple emails following up about said opportunity.” Dr. Graça shares that the process of matching up with a student researcher involves a co-selection process where there must be some compatibility. While she rarely says no to students, there are times when it makes more sense to connect students to someone who might be better positioned to support them at the time. She shares that finding a good fit involves being very clear about time commitments, flexibility, and what each relationship member can contribute.

When asked if she uses the term mentor when describing these relationships, Dr. Graça had a visceral reaction. “Never,” she quipped. She prefers language like research training or possibly research mentoring, but undoubtedly not just mentoring. She justified her reaction in this way:

I think some people actually go into these research mentorships with a more holistic mentorship vision. And I think that some of the things that I consider research mentorship, like how to get jobs and how to do a Ph.D. program or how to write...or even imposter syndrome...this all fits under the research umbrella. So I think just the way I see it is within a research framework. And I see that mentorship is more touchy-feely stuff.

Dyad 6: Dr. Graça and Toni

After completing her undergraduate degree last spring, Toni is a first-term graduate student at All Saints. Like others, location, academic department, and a competitive financial aid package influenced Toni’s decision to attend All Saints. She found a sense of community and connection at All Saints in her academic department through student clubs and research assistant opportunities. She has also worked with a peer mentoring program through the department and is currently a graduate assistant.

Toni met Dr. Graça in her first course in her major program at All Saints. She has since gone on to take several more courses taught by Dr. Graça. When asked to reflect on what drew her to form a relationship with Dr. Graça, Toni referenced the way that Dr. Graça taught her courses:

Her classes were very well structured, in my opinion. I could tell she really wanted me to learn all of this material. She did a lot of hands-on learning. I could just tell she was really accepting of students' ideas and wanted to form them to go further into research.

Toni selected a faculty advisor for her senior thesis project. Toni chose Dr. Graça, which is the point that Toni identifies as the formal start of their mentoring relationship. However, she shared that it felt like a gradual building process as she had already taken several classes with Dr. Graça. Dr. Graça had also hired her as a peer mentor for a formal mentoring program in the department and served as her supervisor. Dr. Graça has also helped connect Toni to another faculty member's research lab.

Toni shared that gender and age both played a role in her selection process for a senior thesis advisor:

It is partially because [Dr. Graça] is the most similar to me in how we look. She's a woman. I'm a woman. And she's closest in age to me. I just feel like I have the most in common with her and she's like the closest adult figure to what I aspire to next in life.

While those identities helped to bring Toni and Dr. Graça together, Toni shared how important it was for her to feel like Dr. Graça believes in her and that she is not a bother:

She always meets with me. I write down a lot of questions to ask her, and she always answers them. So I feel like I just keep adding more and more questions to ask her. Her always being there to help me with my life is very nice and reassuring.

Like Dr. Graça, Toni is not quick to toss around the term mentor. “I don’t like casually say [Dr. Graça] is my mentor, I suppose, but I would call her my mentor if someone were to ask if she was.” When asked to elaborate, Toni shared that being part of a more structured program, such as the peer mentor program, has helped her feel more solid in using the ‘mentor’ terminology.

Dr. Graça also recalls that she first met Toni in the classroom. However, Dr. Graça also named that Toni attended a listening session hosted by the academic department where faculty were trying to determine how they might better serve students of color by creating a more inclusive environment. Toni’s participation in that session led to her being hired as a peer mentor to help enhance a sense of belonging for other undergraduate students in their department. Dr. Graça captures the varied nature of interactions that, over time, built their mentoring relationship: “With Toni, she took the course, and then we started working together on undergraduate research and then had additional contact. And I would say that I ended up talking with her about a lot of non-research related things.” Dr. Graça feels that Toni has been very evident that she is seeking a mentor in this relationship:

Success in science is something that [Toni] is not getting a lot of family support on. [Her family] supports her, but they don’t have any insight into how one would succeed in science. And so...her questions sort of drive us in a direction with mentoring. I think that she very much wants research and mentee advice.

Toni was able to share several benefits she has received as a result of this relationship with Dr. Graça. First, Dr. Graça provides her with a role model in her field of study:

I have a role model in the career I want. I don’t have anybody in my family that is in science, so that is very helpful. Having somebody to go to and not having to just look

online for my answers. I can ask Dr. Graça because she has a lot of lived experience.

She's a really good role model to have, and I think that's really important to try to shape my life.

Second, the support provided by Dr. Graça has helped to build Toni's confidence:

[Dr. Graça] makes me feel way more confident in being a scientist. I feel like if I didn't have reassurance from any of these people, then it'd be a lot harder to try to write grants and research papers and be confident. Because it's still hard to be confident now, and I have support.

Finally, this relationship with Dr. Graça has inspired Toni to consider how she can give back as a way to pay forward the mentorship she has received:

Even doing this interview, I feel like I owe my mentors something back. So I like doing this. I feel like I'm giving back. Sometimes I feel like I just take from my mentors, but it is a give-and-take relationship. I do really like the mentor-mentee relationship.

Summary

This chapter provided the findings of the study, which focused on the experiences of faculty and undergraduate student dyads who have engaged in an informal mentoring relationship. Through semi-structured interviews, I sought to understand how informal mentoring relationships initiate and further develop between an undergraduate student and a faculty member. As I conducted this study at one institution, participants also described what drew them to the institution.

The chapter was organized into three parts: a description of the institution and the study participants, a review of the thematic results that emerged across participants, and an overview of each mentoring dyad's relationship. Data analysis involved line-by-line and axial coding to

identify the four main themes: the element of mutual choosing, the establishment of a *modus operandi*, the importance of shared identities, and ‘faculty as connector.’

In the final chapter, I will discuss my interpretation of the findings, implications, and limitations. Additionally, I will provide recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a discussion and interpretation of findings from Chapter Four. In the previous chapter, I identified four themes related to informal mentoring relationships: the element of mutual choosing, the establishment of a *modus operandi*, the importance of shared identities, and ‘faculty as connector.’ Implications for practice for higher education institutions and professionals are shared. This chapter also describes the study’s limitations, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Discussion

Ample research underscores the importance of earning a college degree and the subsequent benefits for individuals and society. Increased earning potential and lower unemployment rates lead to increased tax contributions (Ma et al., 2019; Pew Research Center, 2014; Seidman, 2012; Tinto, 2012), greater ability to critically analyze information and engage in discussions about global issues (Braxton et al., 2004), and increased civic engagement (Ma et al., 2019) are just a few of these benefits of obtaining a college degree. However, data also highlights that persistence and completion rates vary across identities and that those equity gaps only grew over the past few years due to the COVID-19 pandemic (nscresearchcenter.org).

The isolation introduced into students’ lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of connection and establishing a support network as one navigates the college-going experience. Past retention studies and theories stress the importance of a student’s social and academic integration, sense of belonging, and satisfaction with their college experience (Astin, 1975; Bean, 1990; Tinto, 1993, 2012). As campuses return to more in-person classes and services, there is an opportunity to assist students in (re)establishing connections with one another and faculty and staff.

Mentoring relationships are regularly leveraged in higher education to enhance a student's connection to the institution and mitigate potential student attrition. Formal mentoring programs are essential in this work and often leverage peers (Crisp et al., 2017). However, this research study focuses on informal mentoring relationships that form organically and without a program's formal structure and support. The body of research on informal mentorship is limited and generally focuses on outcomes of one side of the relationship, either mentees or mentors. A gap in the literature exists for studying how these relationships form from the perspective of both members of a dyad.

This interpretive, qualitative study aimed to understand how informal mentoring relationships were initiated and developed between an undergraduate student and a faculty member. Additionally, the study explored the perceived benefits of the relationship from the vantage point of both members of the mentoring dyad. A grounded theory approach was employed to discover rather than confirm previous theories (Charmaz, 2000; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I conducted this study at a private, religiously-affiliated, mission-driven, urban institution in the Midwest with an enrollment of approximately 20,000 students.

Data collection for this study involved individual interviews with each member of the mentoring dyad. I interviewed six faculty-undergraduate student mentoring dyads, identifying participants using a reputational or purposeful snowball sampling method to locate information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Three research questions guided the study:

1. How are informal mentoring relationships between undergraduate students and faculty formed?
2. What do undergraduate students perceive to be the benefits of engaging in informal mentoring relationships with faculty?

3. What do faculty perceive to be the benefits of engaging in informal mentoring relationships with undergraduate students?

Summary and Interpretation of the Findings

Data analysis in this study utilized the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1992) to allow for the inductive building of ideas and categories (Charmaz, 2000). I reviewed each interview transcript using line-by-line coding, identifying keywords and phrases. I compared these keywords and phrases to previous samples with each subsequent interview. In the next analysis stage, these initial keywords and phrases were grouped and organized into larger units resulting in the four themes for this study. A review of the study site and a summary of how these four themes address the research questions follow.

Chapter Four included a discussion of the institutional context through the lens of both student and faculty experiences. Students generally choose to attend All Saints based on the institutional location, academic areas of study, small class sizes, and generous financial aid awards. However, the students in this study later reported that the institution's mission and values stood out as distinguishing marks, indicating that mission introduction and institutional values transmission is taking place, at least in the case of students engaging in this study.

A focus of the extracurricular experience at All Saints involves engaging students in conversations that deepen their understanding of and appreciation for the institution's mission. Interestingly, most of the participants' engagement on campus was localized within their academic department rather than through extensive extracurricular involvements. This fact indicates that mission understanding can be achieved as successfully through these deep, meaningful mentorships as through engagement in other student activities or leadership

opportunities on campus. This finding underscores the importance of employing faculty who appreciate the institution's mission and values.

However, as expected, there are also experiences student participants named where they felt the institution was failing to live up to the espoused values. Angela discussed how the espoused value of inclusion does not always extend to all identity groups on campus:

Something that has been bothering me...All Saints, as a social justice institution, does not talk about anti-Semitism. So I would say that All Saints is a good place to study. We have a very close-knit community, and I feel very comfortable talking to people in that community. But I think that there are some glaring holes in who's included.

Interestingly, Angela continued to describe how she is personally taking action on campus to make a change:

I'm happy that I'm a senior now because I can make myself a nuisance. I'm going to start talking to people and not shutting up about it. We got this...I don't know if I alone did this, but the Student Government came out with a statement. Now I'm focusing on the Women's Center and the Multicultural Student Center.

Ruth shared that her impression of All Saints from when she was a student at another institution did not match her experience once she enrolled:

I had this vision of All Saints from when I went to [nearby college], where it was kind of like a bunch of jerks. Maybe it was just the people that I knew, but I thought, 'Oh, it's just Business bros,' and that hasn't been my experience at all.

Ruth's sentiment, coupled with the abovementioned reasons regarding why students initially choose to attend All Saints, paints a picture of how outsiders perceive the institution. Academic reputation and financial support are well articulated in institutional marketing

strategies. However, there may be an opportunity to strengthen marketing regarding the mission and values of All Saints in order to help differentiate the institution's value proposition.

Overall, the faculty participants in this study expressed similar connections to the institution's mission. Faculty members named a focus on teaching, a diverse student body, and an ethos of care hallmarks of the mission. However, several also acknowledged that workload and coordination issues exist at an institution of All Saints' size. Dr. Danielle both teaches and serves as an administrator and references how important it is to stay connected to the faculty experience:

I think staying connected to my colleagues and having an appreciation of their workload and what's going on in their world as well is particularly important because it is hard to be 100% present for students if you, as a staff or faculty member, are underwater or struggling.

Dr. Colleen shared how autonomy within a department can sometimes be a double-edged sword:

I think one of the challenges that we have as a department is that we all kind of do our own thing, and we're all supportive of everybody doing their own thing. But it's hard to do something cohesive.

As with any institution, All Saints is not immune to challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic tested institutions in new, often unexpected, ways. However, the fact that the students and faculty involved in this study consistently name the institution's mission and values as strengths of the place is promising. Faculty and students alike could name how they have seen the mission coming to life through their engagement with mentoring relationships. This finding allows institutions to consider how these relationships might be more fully leveraged in the future, which will be discussed more in the implications for practice section.

The first theme that emerged, *the Element of Mutual Choosing*, correlates with the first research question regarding how informal mentoring relationships initiate. Participants described cues given and received that indicate a willingness to proceed in a relationship with one another. Most participants in this study formed relationships through academically focused interactions (classes or advising), with one relationship formed due to a student employment role.

The second and third themes that emerged, *Establishing a Modus Operandi and the Importance of Shared Identities*, correlate with the first research question and relate to how informal mentoring relationships are cultivated and developed beyond initiation. I identify several conditions assisting in cultivating a mentoring relationship: structure introduction, regularity of communication and feedback, and time on task.

The fourth theme that emerged, *Faculty as Connector*, addressed the second research question related to the benefits received by students as a result of these mentorships. Beyond the immediate mentoring relationship, faculty mentors opened up new opportunities for student mentors through increased awareness, invitations, or introductions.

Addressing the first research question, “How are informal mentoring relationships between undergraduate students and faculty formed?” participants described the first two of Kram’s (1985) phases of developing mentoring relationships: initiation and cultivation.

Initiation

In interviews, I asked participants to call on and share memories of their first interactions with one another. Participants could recall how they were first introduced in the classroom or through employment or advising interaction. Consistently, participants agreed that their first interactions were positive but sometimes mundane or transactional. This finding indicates that

first impressions play an important role in signaling to students that faculty are available for and potentially interested in more than merely course instruction.

Next, the conversations explored faculty or student cues indicating the possibility of a mentoring relationship. For students, responses mostly centered on faculty members' openness, honesty, and transparency in these initial interactions. Several student participants referenced pedagogy and instructional style as a factor in their decision to approach faculty. Four of the six students referenced how much they enjoyed attending class and learning from their faculty members as a precursor for making a further connection. Similar to findings in a study by Linley et al. (2016), students responded positively to faculty who shared personal stories and anecdotes and allowed for conversational tangents based on where students had questions. The flexibility exhibited by faculty to respond to emerging student interests in the classroom was well-received by the students in this study. For the one student who did not take a course with her mentor, she reported similarly that in the initial phases of their supervisory relationship, her mentor showed openness and transparency that encouraged her to consider a more personal relationship. Regardless of the environment (i.e., classroom, employment, or advising), students in this study reported that faculty willingness to reciprocate vulnerability encourages ongoing relationships.

Most of the faculty participants referenced leaving it to students to take the lead in initiating a relationship. Several faculty shared how they explicitly name that they are open to meeting with students but that the students have to be willing to take them up on their offers. Student willingness to continue to come back and check in drove many of the relationships to develop further. A study by DeAngelo et al. (2016) described the difference between faculty expected-role behaviors and extra-role behaviors, providing some potential context for this approach of the faculty participants in this study. Faculty may consider these informal mentoring

relationships to be extra-role behaviors because they are not expected as part of the faculty's teaching and advising role at most institutions. These extra-role behaviors are often not recognized by formal reward systems. When asked if his mentoring relationships benefited his tenure process, Dr. William, an assistant professor, shared:

I think that's the struggle. I don't think it explicitly benefits me. I definitely mention it when I say, 'I formally advised this number of students; I informally mentored this student.' That at least puts some emphasis on some of the behind-the-scenes work I've been doing. So, yeah, I think there's nothing formal rewarding me, but the fringe benefits are pretty awesome.

Understandably, faculty open to mentoring students may be hesitant to take the lead until they first see some indication of commitment from the student. Faculty participants identified cues of this commitment to include participation in class, returning to continue conversations, and showing some reciprocation and follow-through. Dr. Danielle describes that she is looking for "some signaling of follow through, some past behavior of 'I'm going to take what we've talked about and I'm going to go do something with it and then I'm going to come back and let you know what happened.'" Once that indication is received, the faculty participants in this study all describe accepting the call to mentor.

A finding that continues to intrigue me is that all of the students in this study referenced being strong students and doing well academically. The faculty in the study also referenced that the students were academically talented. Dr. Wellfield approached Claire to work together after Claire submitted a very strong midterm assignment. Dr. William referenced that Mackenzie actively participated in classroom discussions and showed promise in her writing assignments. None of the students referenced first approaching the faculty member for academic support.

Most of the faculty invited the entire class to meet with them. However, in this study, the students who have accepted the offer and formed these mentorships are academically successful. This finding is of interest and worth future exploration.

Cultivation

After discussing the initiation of a relationship, I inquired about what assisted in cultivating the relationship. As previously described, the faculty referenced the importance of reciprocation, negotiating what each member needs, and allowing students to take the lead when forming these mentoring relationships. This finding aligns with Crisp et al.'s (2017) description of four points of consensus regarding mentoring definitions, mainly that mentoring relationships are personal and reciprocal:

1. *Mentoring relationships are focused on the growth and development of students and can be constructed in various forms.*
2. *Mentoring experiences may include broad forms of support, including professional, career, and emotional support.*
3. *Mentoring relationships are personal and reciprocal.*
4. *Relative to their students, mentors have more experience, influence, or achievement within the educational environment.*

Individual characteristics and shared identities played a role in forming these mentoring dyads, supporting previous research findings. Eby et al. (2013), Fries-Britt and Snider (2015), Ghosh (2014), and Parks-Yancy (2012) found increased levels of mentoring support when there is a greater perceived similarity between mentor and mentee. Deng et al. (2021) described how formal mentoring programs might leverage three levels of characteristics in mentor-mentee matching: experiential, surface- and deep-level characteristics. In Chapter Two, I posed two

questions that data from this study may provide insight into (1) Do faculty or students initially seek out one another based on experiential or surface-level characteristics? and (2) In mentoring relationships that progress and mature, do mentors and mentees report shared deep-level characteristics?

Most of the student mentees in this study referenced surface-level characteristics of their mentor that initially drew them to connect. Identity appeared in four ways in this study: age, race/ethnicity, gender, and personality traits (i.e., introversion vs. extroversion). For Mackenzie, the age of her mentor played a factor:

It's really important to have a mentor that's like ten to fifteen years older than you because they have that ten to fifteen extra years of experience, but they're not so far removed from yourself that they can still relate to you and give you direct advice to what you're experiencing as well.

Claire believed that her race/ethnicity played a role in her matching with Dr. Wellfield. Interestingly, she was the only mentee approached by her mentor rather than taking the lead in establishing the relationship. Dr. Wellfield named how race/ethnicity was important for her when selecting a mentee: "I try to mentor students of color whenever possible. I find that students who have a non-White dominant life experience are more adaptable and flexible in times of adversity". Once the relationship began to develop, Claire referenced the importance of working with someone who understood some of the cultural pressures she faced as an international student from China in making academic and career decisions. Similarly, Fries-Britt and Turner Kelly (2005) found that faculty members can inspire same-race student mentees by sharing their struggles and empathizing with student challenges.

Angela, Jennifer, Toni, and Ruth each referenced gender as a shared identity with their mentors. Three of the four mentees study in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. Fries-Britt and Snider (2015) underscored the importance of women having mentors who can help them negotiate their experiences in the academy. Findings from Hernandez et al. (2017) support the importance of shared gender identity for women in STEM fields and found that mentorship led to strengthened scientific identity and interest in career pathways. Each participant in this study expressed increased confidence in their career options due to their mentoring relationship.

While most of the student mentees in this study did not reference these shared identities as the sole or even primary reason for establishing a relationship, each shared that this commonality held some significance during their experience with their mentor. Moreover, deep-level characteristics, including values, attitudes, and personality traits such as openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, play an essential role in negotiating the modus operandi of these mentoring relationships.

These deep-level characteristics seem to influence the relationships regarding structure and communication. At this stage of cultivating the mentoring relationship, faculty in this study begin to take more of the lead rather than expecting students to do so as they did during the initiation phase. Faculty described the importance of establishing clear expectations for the mentee-mentor relationship. For some, this involved weekly check-in meetings or having mentees submit regular updates on work projects. For others, the structure was more loosely defined.

Four of the six mentees in this study self-identified as shy or introverted, while the other two self-identified as extroverted and outgoing. A finding that emerged is that the students who

identified as introverted established a more structured arrangement with their mentor than mentees who self-identified as extroverted. Introverted students expressed a desire to have clear expectations to mitigate fears of being viewed as a bother to their mentor. For each of these four mentees, the structure was introduced by jointly managing a research project or through an employment opportunity. When asked what facilitates a relationship becoming deeper and more productive, Dr. Wellfield shared:

It's usually just time. It is not something that you can speed up. You can't rush it. It's like working with fine wines. There's nothing that you can rush. You have to just lay the foundations, have the right oak barrel, have the right grapes, and have the right temperature. And similarly, you have to create this structure around the students to allow them to grow within it and not try to rush them.

While the participants in this study reported having a positive experience with their mentoring dyad, the faculty shared that not every mentoring relationship works out well. Dr. William described a previous mentoring relationship that could have been more enjoyable: "Each relationship is different but it's got to be reciprocal. With [previous mentee name], I felt like her project manager. That was super stressful and not great. I would not want to do that again." Dr. Colleen shared a time when her skills and talents as a mentor did not align with student mentee needs and how there is a benefit to helping a student find a different mentor:

I think [the mentee switching to another faculty mentor] was a good choice because, in some ways, I don't know that I was the best mentor for her. I think what she needed...the kinds of skills that she needed to develop are ones that I'm not particularly good at teaching. I learned about where my strengths lie, and where they don't, and where I need to call on a colleague to provide mentoring that I can't provide.

The faculty mentors in this study could describe how the specific relationships evolved over time and even how relationships differed across mentees. However, most faculty mentors stopped short of articulating a mentoring philosophy that provides them with a consistent approach to setting up these relationships. These findings matter because providing structure and setting up expectations in mentoring relationships can be learned and practiced. This idea will be discussed further in the upcoming recommendations for practice.

Before we go any further, it is essential to note the well-documented disparate effect mentoring undergraduate and graduate students has on faculty of color (Griffin, 2012; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017). Griffin & Reddick (2011) found that Black faculty members carry a heavy mentorship burden. Gender further influences how that mentorship plays out with Black women “engaging students in a proximal, semifamilial manner (p. 1045). Guiffrida (2005) refers to this engagement as “othermothering.” Studies have explored the intersections of race, gender, and sexual orientation and found that individuals holding marginalized identities spent more time on “invisible work,” activities that do not generally count toward tenure and promotion (Lindley et al., 2016; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017).

The research design of this study focused on identifying mentoring dyads without consideration for a specific identity or the intersection of identities. As such, the current findings did not explore this issue directly. However, implications for this study must be cognizant of the disproportionate burden placed on individual faculty members based on identity. I will discuss this further in the implications for practice and recommendations for research sections.

Addressing the second research question, “What do undergraduate students perceive to be the benefits of engaging in informal mentoring relationships with faculty?” responses generally

mapped to two of the four mentoring functions described by Crisp and Cruz (2009):

psychological and emotional support, degree and career support, academic subject knowledge support, and role modeling support. Claire, Mackenzie, and Jennifer describe how their relationship with a mentor allowed them to explore degree and career options. When asked about what kinds of conversations she has with her mentor, Jennifer shared:

Around class selection time, we discuss a little bit more broadly in terms of looking at the future and potential avenues that I would explore postgrad. Or things that I would explore during my time here at All Saints that would help me fall into certain avenues postgrad. Most recently, she helped me kind of land on the minors that I selected. I was debating between a couple of different minors, and she helped me just kind of figure out which ones were going to be the best for what I'm thinking about looking at postgrad. One of the things that we talked about was what I don't want to do, which I found really helpful. Because in knowing what you don't want, you can narrow down what you do want.

Angela, Ruth, and Toni referenced the importance of access to a role model, which they gained through their mentoring relationship. Toni shared:

I have a role model in the career I want. I don't have anybody in my family that is in science, so that is very helpful. Having somebody to go to and not having to just look online for my answers. I can ask Dr. Graça because she has a lot of lived experience. She's a really good role model to have, and I think that's really important to try to shape my life.

Ruth adds how Dr. Danielle role models how to set priorities and negotiate decisions:

When I've said, 'I'm having trouble kind of working through this in this class,' [Dr. Danielle]'s like, 'Okay, how can I help you work through it?' She's just always trying to

figure out if there are barriers she can help knock down or help me build the skills to knock them down myself.

Students also referenced psychological and emotional support as a benefit of their mentoring relationships; however, they often situated this support in the context of either career or role modeling support. Mackenzie framed it this way:

I'd say most of our conversations definitely were in the academics and future career sphere, and then when we were talking about personal things, it was still in that context. I worked on a tutoring project with Dr. William where we were tutoring high school seniors on their college admission essays. So talking through that process and talking through my own college admission process experience obviously brings up personal things. But still kind of in that professional context. And the same with grad school. He would check in and ask like, "oh, how do your parents feel about you going to grad school? How are things going? What are you looking for in a program, and where are you going to live next?" So we definitely had personal conversations and a personal relationship as well, but usually always under that academic professional umbrella.

A "faculty as connectors" theme also emerged within these mentoring functions. Faculty mentors served to connect students in myriad ways. Jennifer, Toni, and Mackenzie articulated that their mentoring relationship made them more aware of resources available at All Saints and employment or research opportunities. Claire and Angela referenced how their faculty mentors included them by extending invitations to events or activities at All Saints. Ruth and Claire referenced the benefit of being introduced to other faculty members by their mentors.

The students' benefits also affirm Rendón's (1994) work on validation. Validation theory asserts that students report feeling more capable of learning, increased self-confidence, greater

levels of involvement and connection, and better ability to take advantage of opportunities in higher education when validating agents (faculty mentors in this study) repeatedly engage with them. Across all the interviews, students confirmed these effects of the validation they received from their mentoring experiences. Five of the six explicitly said they felt more confident due to mentorship. Mackenzie shared:

I think my mentoring relationship with Dr. William...really helped me work through a lot of those anxieties and fears that were holding me back before. I feel even a lot more confident in my relationships with my supervisors at work now and with professors.

In describing her relationship with Dr. Graça, Toni expressed: “Just her always being there to help me with my life is very nice and reassuring and it improves my confidence.”

The findings of this study show plenty of benefits to students when they engage informal mentoring relationships with faculty. Degree and career support and role modeling led to self-reports of increased confidence and connection. In the end, all six of the students in this study have pursued or are in the process of pursuing graduate studies and report that their experiences with mentorship influenced their career trajectories.

Addressing the third research question, “What do faculty perceive to be the benefits of engaging in informal mentoring relationships with undergraduate students?” faculty participants expressed several benefits. First, faculty feel a sense of pride and satisfaction in witnessing the growth and development of students. Dr. Colleen summed it up like this:

One of the benefits to me is...so much of what I do as a faculty member is to plant seeds. And I never know with most students how, if, or in what ways those seeds are going to grow. And the students with whom I have a deeper mentoring relationship, I get to see a little bit more of the actual growth. I get to see the fruit, or at least some of the fruits of

my labor. They're the students who are more likely to follow up later and come back and say, 'Hey, this is what I'm doing now, and this is how our interactions were beneficial.'

And that is life-giving for me. It's something that helps me continue to keep planting the seeds.

Several faculty mentors also referenced how these mentoring relationships facilitate their own growth. Dr. William, Dr. Colleen, and Dr. Danielle each name how they learn about themselves through their engagement with mentees. Dr. William named how these relationships can provide some perspective to his work:

I think for me it helped me understand how powerful teaching and mentoring can be. The research I can do. I like doing research with other people. I can collaborate in my sleep.

But mentoring is a different type of collaboration. I think if you do it right, it feels more complete.

Finally, Dr. Graça and Dr. Wellfield both reference the opportunity that mentorship provides them to help shape the next generation of scholars in their academic disciplines. Dr. Graça specifically sees her acts of mentoring as a way to diversify her field:

Getting students into different disciplines who might not already be the majority, I find very important. Because it's challenging to look at a discipline and see there's so much capacity but [academic area of interest research] can't happen if it's homogeneous.

While the benefits for faculty mentors exist, it was apparent in this study that the benefits for student mentees greatly outweigh the benefits to faculty mentors. These informal mentoring relationships often rely on the goodwill and generosity of faculty members. In the next section, I will outline some implications for practice that address this finding.

As referenced in Chapter Four, I could not interview a mentee for one of the faculty mentors who completed an interview. However, I find it important to introduce Dr. Katie's interview as she shared some unique perspectives that can inform future practice and research implications. Unlike other participants, Dr. Katie identifies her mentorship regularly stemming from cohort-based experiences such as study abroad courses, senior capstones, or a prison exchange program. Uniquely, she finds that her mentorship often starts after students graduate, and individual and group relationships continue for many years. Finally, Dr. Katie shared that creating spaces where smaller groups of students wrestle with topics of race, power, and identity helps establish connections.

Dyad 7: Dr. Katie (no student mentee)

Dr. Katie is an Associate Professor at All Saints and has been on the faculty for approximately twenty years. Much like several other faculty previously referenced, Dr. Katie chooses to teach at All Saints because of the focus on teaching and the demographics of the student body:

I was really attracted to the teaching institution. I came from a research institution, but I got into this gig because I saw myself as more of a teacher than somebody that was just going to turn out a bunch of books, and that has certainly been the case. And so I think it's the right place for me. I'm also glad to be working in a place that has so many first-generation students, whether they're first-generation college students, or first or second-generation immigrants, folks who may not otherwise have had a chance to go to college. It reflects on my background as well so I'm glad to be at a school that has that population and is committed to working with that population.

Initially, Dr. Katie's sense of connection to the institution centered on her academic department. Over time, that connection expanded due to her increased participation in identity-centered groups: an association of Black faculty and staff, a steering committee for a newly established academic department, and an informal gathering of female faculty from around campus. Dr. Katie also began teaching and leading study abroad programs, where she identifies many of her mentorship practices beginning. Dr. Katie names that studying abroad "accelerates the bonding with students." Her trips abroad with students "created this fantastic community, and I'm still in touch with many of those students." Finally, Dr. Katie began teaching in a prison exchange program, where she identified most of her mentoring relationships over the past six years. Like studying abroad, All Saints students usually travel together to a prison setting to take a course with individuals experiencing incarceration. Dr. Katie shares that students who have enrolled in those courses over the years have "become this very massive, very interdisciplinary, very cross-racial, cross-age groupings, and very collaborative" group of individuals with extended relationships.

Speaking to the power of that class experience, Dr. Katie discussed her first cohort for the prison exchange course:

That's definitely where [mentorship] has been centering since I taught my first class there in the spring of 2016. I had eight students for that class, and I'm still in consistent touch with four and still in very frequent contact with three. I just wrote a letter of recommendation for a fourth one for graduate school and wrote her a letter of recommendation for a Fulbright last year. I mean, it's a connection. It's a community.

Many similarities exist between a study abroad experience and a prison exchange program. Students must take the initiative to plan and apply in advance for both experiences.

Students get vetted either through an interview process or through a clearance screening process for gaining access to the prison. Participants receive boilerplate expectations and rules before participation. Dr. Katie needs to establish the role she would play as the faculty member in both of these groups. She shared a story from her early days of leading study abroad when she asked a student what role she would see Dr. Katie playing in her study abroad experience: “Maybe kind of like that cool auntie that just kind of keeps an eye on us, sort of snatches us off the cliff, you know, before we jump over, but otherwise stays out of our way.” Dr. Katie found the spirit of that comment to be a good model for setting up expectations with students through these cohort-based, intensive experiences. Dr. Katie shares that years later, several past students who remain in touch with her still refer to her as “Auntie [Dr.] Katie.”

Dr. Katie describes her initial tone in a classroom as more formal. She lists herself as Dr. [Dr. Katie’s last name] in her syllabus and expects that students do not use her first name at the onset of the relationship. Dr. Katie names that as a woman of color who has worked hard to earn a doctoral degree and who comes from a cultural tradition where you only first name adults once they permit you several times, this distinction is important for her. She also is very aware of her resting facial expression and what that may project to students: “I realize that...I have this natural kind of frown. So I’m very mindful that I have a facial expression that does not welcome people in, and so it’s always a balance for me to kind of soften that up.” However, she shares that it is only a matter of time until that tough façade softens and that generally, within the first three to four weeks of a course, her “goofball” side emerges. Like other faculty in this study, Dr. Katie references the importance of setting early boundaries, as once interactions become too loose, it is increasingly difficult to pull back and regain respect.

When asked to reflect on whether students who have engaged with her in these long-term mentorship relationships had anything in common, Dr. Katie shared the importance of how she constructs space and leads discussions:

They all took classes with me that were smaller, upper-level, where you could really have discussions. You can just let your guard down and just talk. The vast majority of these connections come from these classes, whether they're in a study abroad setting or a prison setting or just a seminar where it's just maybe 15 people, and [students] kind of get to know each other. I think lots of times, this mentorship is born out of classes where you really have to cut through the surface. And, you know, because I do teach on race and issues of identity and power, we're always cutting through the surface.

Different from other faculty interviewed, Dr. Katie feels that most of the mentorship she engages in has very little structure and more closely resembles friendship:

Often the mentorship piece of it doesn't start until after they graduate for me, and I think maybe that's just because I'm worried about it looking like I'm playing favorites. So typically, that mentorship piece really doesn't get deep until they've graduated. Then after that, we reach out, 'Hey, how are you doing? Let's have some lunch.'

The friendships that form are one of the benefits of her engaging in mentorship:

It's hard to use the term mentoring because it's so reciprocated. You know, these friendships and these students, they keep the circulation going. I'm always learning from them. They crack me up. I get so overjoyed at hearing what they're doing. It's great to see what they are doing with their lives.

Finally, Dr. Katie shares how these relationships also provide her opportunities to learn and grow. Describing an experience of connecting with a prior student who now works in a community organization, Dr. Katie recounts:

That's when I realized, 'Okay, I'm the student here.' And so the script was completely flipped. And it was phenomenal! I have learned so much from working with these [past students]. It's really mutual instruction, so I think I've benefited from these relationships way more than they do. And I think that's one reason that they've gone on as long as they have. They keep me on my toes. They tell me what's current. They're just fun, so some of this is purely selfish motivation. Hanging out with them has absolutely improved my teaching.

Implications for Practice

Based on the results of this study, I will make three recommendations for practice to encourage and facilitate mentorship between undergraduate students and faculty. The first recommendation is specific to the institution featured in this study, while the remaining recommendations apply to myriad institutional contexts.

First, All Saints University identifies as a mission-driven institution with a well-articulated set of institutional values. Responses from both faculty and student participants in this study highlight their understanding of the institutional mission and values. Participants share examples of how their informal mentoring relationships embodied All Saints University's values of teaching, service to others, and inclusion of individuals with diverse identities. Faculty could name these distinguishing marks of the institution when accepting a role to teach at All Saints. However, students referred to other factors influencing their initial decision to attend (e.g., location, academic program options, and financial aid packages). Only once they arrived on

campus did the students in this study begin to appreciate and engage with the mission and values of the place.

Herein lies the opportunity for All Saints and potentially similar institutions with distinct missions and values. Institutions can differentiate themselves from their market competitors by clearly articulating the mission characteristics during the undergraduate admission process. Ideally, All Saints can attract more students who feel drawn to the institution because of the values and commitments of the place, in addition to solid academic programs. Once students arrive on campus, program administrators (e.g., orientation professionals, academic advisors, and first-year seminar instructors) can introduce to new students the benefits of mentoring and provide a roadmap for initiating mentoring relationships. This study underscores the power of connecting those students and faculty who share an appreciation for the institutional mission and values and the benefits each derives from the relationships.

My second recommendation is to find ways to assist faculty in establishing a mentoring philosophy. Most faculty participants in this study referenced mentoring several students in the past. Few faculty named a consistent approach to initiate and cultivate these relationships. The closest to a consistent approach was shared by Dr. Katie. She articulated how she leverages intensive cohort-based experiences or seminar-style capstone courses to create an environment that promotes openness and trust when negotiating topics of identity and power.

However, as Dr. William aptly remarked: “Mentorship is work.” Institutions have an opportunity to create professional development workshops to make this work more manageable by bringing faculty together to share best practices, reflect on their own experiences with mentorship, and devise a mentoring philosophy. Informal mentoring is often considered extra-role behavior (DeAngelo et al., 2016) for faculty with few reward and recognition systems. Yet,

this study finds benefits for both faculty and students who engage. If institutions want to encourage the establishment of more informal mentoring relationships, they should leverage the shared knowledge and practices of the community. Establishing reward and recognition systems to honor the faculty labor involved in this work is also essential, especially given the disproportionate effect described previously.

Dr. Wellfield has a long history of providing mentorship. When asked about how to encourage other faculty to provide similar support to students, she shared some sage advice about focusing on faculty who have a particular disposition:

To be honest with you, I think that faculty are kind of in two camps. One is people who are willing to take the time, are inquisitive and flexible, want to be pushed to think outside the box, and are willing to tolerate mistakes. And then there's another half of the faculty who just don't want to be bothered by [mentoring students]. You shouldn't force them either because they'd be terrible at it. Not everyone should be a mentor. Not everyone should see themselves as a mentor.

Finally, I recommend that formal mentoring programs on college campuses leverage the findings of this study to consider how they might conduct mentor-mentee matching and enhance the depth of relationships in their programs. Informal mentoring relationships show the benefit of sustained, deep mentor-mentee connections; however, they tend to involve individuals rather than groups. Formal mentoring programs generally have the opportunity to increase the scale of mentorship. By leveraging the support of an administrator, an application process, and potentially funding for student participants, formal mentoring programs benefit from structure and consistency in approach. An opportunity to combine the scalability of formal mentoring programs with the depth of informal mentoring relationships should be explored.

Deng et al.'s (2021) three levels of characteristics in mentor-mentee matching can provide a starting point for this work. The findings of this study show that in informal mentoring relationships, surface-level characteristics initiated drew students to engage with faculty. However, deep-level characteristics facilitated the cultivation of a more profound, sustained mentorship. Formal mentoring programs could delay the matching process and allow for more interaction between potential mentors and mentees to assess the deep-level characteristics of each participant. Additionally, formal mentoring programs can leverage course-based cohort experiences (e.g. study abroad, learning communities, capstones) to facilitate increased faculty mentorship rather than focusing primarily on peer or staff mentorship.

Study Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

As with any study, defined study boundaries provide limitations for the findings. I articulate the current study's limitations and future research recommendations in this section.

The current study occurred at one private, mission-driven, four-year institution in the Midwest. While the findings have utility for this institutional type, the ability to generalize some results is limited. A recommendation for future research is to conduct a similar study at various other institutions. Do findings differ at public institutions? Two-year institutions? Do findings differ at institutions that lack a clear mission and values?

Second, I conducted this study on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic and several years of disruption of campus experiences for students and faculty. A criterion for inclusion in the study limited participation to dyads who had engaged within the past year. This time boundary excluded some faculty who previously reported having sustained informal mentoring relationships with undergraduates but had a gap in their relationships due to the pandemic. Additionally, the criterion for inclusion did not identify a consistent length of mentoring

relationship across dyads. This limitation led to dyads being at different stages of their relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, or redefinition (Kram, 1985). A first recommendation for future research is to conduct this study again after more time has passed following the shutdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic. Campuses are returning to more in-person classes and activities each year, which may allow for more faculty-student contact leading to increased mentoring connections. Another recommendation for future research is to focus on a stage in the relationship process. Suppose all participants are identified at the same stage (i.e., separation). In that case, comparisons could be made across mentoring dyads to identify how each progressed through relationship stages (i.e., initiation and cultivation).

Third, the design of this study focused on exploring the relationships through the study of both members of a dyad. As such, the study included a small number of dyads. The sampling technique, reputational case sampling, relied on faculty to identify as providing mentorship and then identify students to invite into the study. This approach led to the inclusion of successful mentoring cases and a bias toward academically talented students. In interviews, faculty briefly referenced other mentoring relationships they have engaged in with varying levels of success. An opportunity for future research is to complicate this study's findings by introducing negative cases or dyadic relationships that initiated but lacked cultivation or continuation. There may be as much to learn from less successful mentoring cases as there is to learn from successful mentoring cases.

Additionally, future research could explore just one side of the relationship from either the faculty or student perspective. A focus on the faculty experience with informal mentoring could seek to identify and map a shared faculty mentoring philosophy. Focusing on the student

experience with informal mentoring could seek to understand what motivates a student who is academically struggling to connect for mentorship rather than just course support.

Finally, while this study did not ask participants to name their salient social identities, interview data provided some insights into how shared identities can influence the mentoring experience. A recommendation for future research is to focus on mentoring relationships that form around identity more intentionally, such as women in STEM or shared gender or racial/ethnic identities of mentor and mentee.

Conclusion

Mentorship has been the focus of much business, psychology, and education research over the past thirty years. While scholars have struggled to settle on a shared definition of the term, studies have shown the power of mentoring relationships for mentors and mentees. This study sought to extend that literature base by exploring informal mentoring relationships between undergraduate students and faculty members.

Interviews with informal mentoring dyads provided insight into how these relationships form and develop over time. Student mentees often take the lead in the initial stages of forming the relationship and provide cues to faculty of their willingness to enter into a relationship with reciprocation. Faculty mentors then assist in developing these relationships by offering transparency and providing structure. As with any relationship, mentorship takes effort; however, benefits abound for mentees and mentors alike.

Institutional leaders can help establish a culture of mentorship on campus by sharing the benefits, describing how students and faculty access these relationships, and creating spaces to support these critical engagements. Dr. Danielle captures the best of mentorship:

A mentor should be someone who is there to be supportive with judgment that is well positioned, not judgment for judgment's sake, but judgment that is food for thought. I don't have to agree with every decision that my mentee makes. But I do want them to know that I'm in their corner, and I'm going to listen and be supportive and help them talk through or think through things that may be on their mind. From the perspective of someone who is not a family member, is not a friend, whose connection is built on a very different foundation than some of those other relationships.

And in the end, who does not need someone in their corner?

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT EMAIL INVITATION

FACULTY EMAIL INVITATION

Dear Faculty Member,

I am a staff member who works in the Division of Student Affairs at All Saints University. I am also a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Dianne Renn in the College of Education at Illinois State University. My research interests focus on mentoring relationships in collegiate environments. As an undergraduate student, faculty and staff mentors played critical roles in my academic journey. As a professional in the field, my work for the past 20 years has centered on creating support networks for undergraduate students and their families.

I am conducting a research study that involves faculty who have engaged in an informal mentoring relationship with an undergraduate student(s) within the past two years. Informal mentoring is being defined as relationships formed outside the structure of a formal mentoring program. Common to formal programs is the inclusion of participant applications and mentor-mentee matches facilitated through a program administrator. This study will focus on relationships that form outside of these formal processes through more organic means (i.e. classroom interactions, research teams, student organization advising). Your participation will provide valuable insights into how these informal mentoring relationships can be developed and sustained by future students and faculty members on college campuses.

I am seeking faculty who are able to identify and encourage an undergraduate mentee to also participate in this study along with themselves. Participation would include a 30-45 minute virtual Zoom interview about how this relationship was established, has developed, and the perceived benefits of the relationships for each member of the faculty-student dyad. Interviews will be conducted separately and what you share will not be shared with your student mentee. Follow-up Zoom interviews would be conducted as needed. All participant information will be kept confidential.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to this email with your preferred contact number. Upon receiving your message, I will contact you to answer any questions before moving forward. I will provide you an email invitation template to share with the student. Participation is completely voluntarily for both members of the mentoring dyad. Once both members of the dyad agree to participate, I will contact you both to schedule separate interviews. If you know of other faculty members at All Saints University who are known to have informal mentoring relationships with students, please pass along this invitation to participate to them as well.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Tom Menchhofer

STUDENT EMAIL INVITATION

Dear [student name],

I have been approached to participate in a study on mentoring relationships between faculty members and undergraduate students. I would like to invite you to join in this research project as well. The details of the project are listed in the text below. If you are available and interested in participating, please reach out to Tom Menchhofer directly at tomench@ilstu.edu as soon as possible. Thank you for considering,

Sincerely,
[Faculty name]

I am a staff member who works in the Division of Student Affairs at All Saints University. I am also a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Dianne Renn in the College of Education at Illinois State University. My research interests focus on mentoring relationships in collegiate environments. As an undergraduate student, faculty and staff mentors played critical roles in my academic journey. As a professional in the field, my work for the past 20 years has centered on creating support networks for undergraduate students and their families.

I am conducting a research study that involves undergraduate students who have engaged in an informal mentoring relationship with a faculty member within the past two years. Informal mentoring is being defined as relationships formed outside the structure of a formal mentoring program. Common to formal programs is the inclusion of participant applications and mentor-mentee matches facilitated through a program administrator. This study will focus on relationships that form outside of these formal processes through more organic means (i.e. classroom interactions, research teams, student organization advising). Your participation will provide valuable insights into how these informal mentoring relationships can be developed and sustained by future students and faculty members on college campuses.

I would like to request your participation in this study, along with your faculty mentor. Participation would include a 30-45 minute virtual Zoom interview about how this relationship was established, has developed, and the perceived benefits of the relationships to each member of the faculty-student dyad. Interviews will be conducted separately and what you share will not be shared with your faculty mentor. Follow-up Zoom interviews would be conducted as needed. All participant information will be kept confidential. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and choosing to decline participation should not have any effect on your relationship with your faculty mentor.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please email me at tomench@ilstu.edu with your preferred contact number. Upon receiving your message, I will contact you to answer any questions before moving forward. Once both members of the dyad agree to participate, I will contact you both to schedule separate interviews.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Tom Menchhofer

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Interview questions:

- 1) ***[UNDERSTANDING PERSONAL and INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT]*** Let's start by describing your time as a student/faculty member at All Saints.
 - How would you describe yourself? Outgoing, quiet, (un)comfortable in new environments, introverted/extroverted, etc.
 - How long have you been teaching at or attending here? What brought you to All Saints or why did you choose to attend/take a position here?
 - How might you describe this place to others?
 - Do you feel connected to this place? What has contributed to this sense of belonging?
- 2) ***[BROAD REFLECTIONS ON RELATIONSHIP]*** Let's pivot now to discuss your mentoring relationship with [name of mentor/mentee].
 - How would you describe the relationship you have with [name of mentor/mentee]?
 - On average, how often do you interact with one another? Daily? Weekly? Monthly?
 - In what form/modality generally (email, online/Zoom, in-person, one-on-one or in group settings, in class/lab, on-campus or off-campus)?
 - What are some examples of things you do together or discuss with one another?
 - What makes this relationship unique or different from other relationships you have on campus?
 - What motivates you to continue this relationship over time?
- 3) ***[RELATIONSHIP FORMATION]*** Think back to when you first met.
 - How did the relationship start? Who initiated the relationship? How did you know they were open to forming a relationship?
 - Has the relationship been continuous or has there been starts and stops?
 - When did you realize this relationship was unique or different from other relationships?
 - Do you refer to this person as a mentor/mentee or is it just implied?
- 4) ***[PERCEPTION OF BENEFITS]***
 - What good has come out of being in this relationship?
 - How would you describe the benefits of this relationship?
 - Relationships can be complicated and take regular effort to maintain. Have you ever found it difficult to maintain this relationship? What contributed to that feeling? What assisted you in overcoming those moments?
 - Has this relationship had any effect on other relationships you have formed at this institution?
- 5) ***[WRAPPING UP]***
 - What advice would you give to other faculty/students regarding establishing informal mentoring relationships?
 - Is there anything else you'd like to share?