

IMPACT OF PROJECT MENTOR ON MENTORS AT EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Across a variety of settings, research has shown that mentoring programs focused on promoting physical health and well-being provide many benefits to the mentees (Dowd, 2014). However, mentoring programs outside of health-related fields have also yielded benefits to mentors (DuBois, 2008).

In a meta-analysis conducted by David DuBois (2008), significant relationships were found between workplace mentoring and career attitudes, workplace attitudes, and career outcomes. In the same study, DuBois examined the impact of academic mentorship on mentees. This revealed a positive relationship between academic mentorship and improvements in both career and employment outcomes (2008). Furthermore, both workplace and academic mentorship programs positively impacted mentee's positive self-image, emotional adjustment, and psychological well-being (2008). Finally, DuBois' research revealed that being mentored is related to more positive social relationships, higher performance, and less problematic behavior (2008).

While mentoring programs almost always yield positive benefits to the mentees, certain types of mentorship may be more effective than others. DuBois discovered a pattern that suggests that academic mentorship is substantially more effective and impactful than youth mentoring (2008). This makes sense because, oftentimes, youth are impacted more by their parents, peer relationships, or other external factors that mentorship programs have no control over. Academic mentorship was also observed to have a greater effect on the mentee than workplace mentorship (2008). It is likely that relationships between co-workers, along with a host of external factors are why workplace mentorship does not have as big of an effect as academic mentorship.

Although it is interesting to see the effects of different mentorship programs in different environments, the main focus of this research is on youth health behavior - more specifically - the benefits of mentoring programs structured around improving health behaviors of the mentees and mentors of the program. In mentoring programs focused on improving health behaviors in youth, significant improvements in leisure time physical activity behavior and self-regulatory healthy eating behaviors have been observed in youth after they finish the mentoring program (Dowd, 2014). Participants also reported improvements in health enhancing cognitions and behaviors upon completion of the program (2014). Studies on elementary school children have shown that mentorship programs result in statistically significant improvements in body mass index (BMI) (Lee, 2016). Not only do mentees observe positive change during mentorship programs, but after as well. Children who were mentored gained knowledge about healthy eating, and those who were overweight were more likely to decrease the number of calories they consumed from fatty foods (Haire-Joshu, 2010). This is an example of the lasting impact that mentorship can have on youth.

While physical health improvements after participating in a mentorship program are important, they are not the only benefits derived from mentoring. Mental health and self-esteem has also been shown to improve after participating in a mentoring program (Lee, 2016). While this may be due to the fact that the mentees lost weight over the course of the program, it could also be from the encouragement and social support that they received from their mentors, which had a lasting impact on the mentees' perceptions of themselves (Smith, 2016).

Besides physical and mental health improvements, mentoring programs have been known to increase mentees GPA in school settings (2008). Self-reported quality of life has also been shown to increase as mentees became healthier over the course of the program (Foster, 2015). Mentor programs affect many different areas of mentee's lives, and in very positive ways, which

begs the question, "What factors influence these changes the most?" One of the biggest ones is who serves as the mentor.

A unique aspect of mentoring programs is that anyone can serve as a mentor. Because of this, it is important to note the different results associated with the different types of people serving as mentors. In mentorship programs where college students acted as mentors to physically unfit high-schoolers, GPA and physical activity scores of the high schoolers increased substantially (Chen, 2017). The positive results of this mentorship program could be due in part to the fact that the high-schoolers mentors were close to their own age.

Mentorship by a mentor close to the mentee's age is called "peer mentorship." Peer mentorship is a very effective method of mentoring, because it allows the mentee to engage with someone their own age who can relate to them more closely. By providing mentees with the social support of someone their own age, mentees are given all of the tools necessary to build self-efficacy, competence, and skills needed to sustain a lifetime of physical activity behavior (Smith, 2016). Not only do peer mentors help mentees to build social skills, in health behavior related studies, mentees showed improvements in their physical fitness, as well as their cardiorespiratory fitness (Spencer, 2014). To add to the benefits of peer mentors, many of the skills and traits that the mentees learn throughout the course of the mentoring program will stick with them for years to come. Additionally, in a study done by Smith and Holloman, two groups of mentees were mentored separately – one by teens, the other by adults. At the end of the program, the only group that showed significant improvements in physical activity behavior, eating behavior, and diastolic blood pressure was the teen-mentored group; the group mentored by adults showed no improvements in any health-related categories (Holloman, 2013). While this study suggests that peers serving as mentors may be more effective than adults serving as mentors, it is not conclusive,

as there are many other factors that may affect the results. Furthermore, it is possible that the method of mentoring by adults may determine how successful the program is.

In a study conducted by Leahey and Wing, adults served as the mentors, rather than teens or peers, to help obese participants to lose weight. However, their title was altered – they were addressed as a "professional," "peer," or "mentor" health coaches (Leahey, 2013). In addition, the conditions in which they worked with their "mentees" were altered to better fit their title. At the end of the study, there was a statistically significant difference in weight loss between the professional and mentor health coaches, with 40% more of the professional health coaches' mentees losing at least 10% of their body weight (2013). The number of mentees that lost 10% of their body weight for the peer health coaches was approximately the same as the professional health coaches (2013). This suggests that, perhaps, it is not the age of the mentor that impacts results (i.e. peer mentors are not necessarily better than adult mentors), but rather, their title, the role they play, and how they are perceived by their mentees.

One final factor that may impact a mentorship program's effectiveness is how long the program is. While it is difficult to say whether or not length of a program plays a major role in the success of that program, there does seem to be a possible correlation with longer programs yielding more lasting results. In a study done by Holland-Carter and Tuerk - which was a year-long study - those who took part in the study recorded an increase in sex life, physical function, and work domain in checkups months after the program was completed (Holland-Carter, 2017). However, regardless of how long a program lasted, almost every study reviewed reported positive outcomes immediately after the program's conclusion. Based on these findings, the duration of a mentorship program may not be important for *immediate* perceived benefits of a mentorship program.

However, duration may be important for *long-term retainment* of positive health-behavior changes.

Up until now, the primary focus has been on the benefits of mentorship programs on the mentees that participate in them. However, past research has shown that mentorship programs also have positive benefits on the mentors. When observing the benefits derived from mentoring, almost all of them could be categorized into one of three main categories: personal, social, or professional.

Personal benefits can be defined as any benefits or positive impacts a mentoring program has on the mentor that affects an intangible part of who they are. For example, in a study done by Pinto, Dunsiger, & Kamson, mentors reported improvements in their sense of self confidence and self-worth, improved their listening skills, helped them to overcome shyness, and helped them realize that they had the power to motivate other people (2017). All of these personal benefits came from participating in one study as a mentor. In another study where mentors interacted with their mentees over Skype, mentors observed improvements in their confidence, preparation, and self-efficacy (Kohut, 2017). This is interesting to see, because even though these mentors never met with their mentees in person, they still derived similar personal benefits as mentors who met with their mentees face-to-face on a regular basis. Some unique benefits to mentors that may not be expected include improvements in civic attitudes, community service, self-efficacy, self-esteem, interpersonal and problem-solving skills, political awareness, and civic action (Weiler, 2013). College students who acted as mentors for at-risk youth in their communities reported improvements in all of the aforementioned categories, whereas their peers who did not participate in the study did not report any significant improvements (2013). Personal benefits derived from mentorship also include improvements in coaching and teaching skills (Pinto, 2017). The main

reason for the development of these skills is because of the interactions and exposure that the mentorship programs provided mentors with. Without their time spent being a mentor, many of these individuals would not be as well-equipped for teaching or leading others in the future.

Personal benefits gained from being a mentor serve as the foundation to all other benefits associated with mentoring. By improving oneself, an individual is better equipped to make positive changes in social and professional settings. Let's first focus on some of the social benefits commonly associated with mentoring.

Numerous studies have shown a correlation between mentoring and improved social skills and interactions. Mentorship has helped mentors to become more outgoing, which in turn allowed them to form and develop more relationships with people they otherwise would not have (Pinto, 2017). Mentors who took part in a mentorship program observed an increase in confidence levels after being a mentor (Kohut, 2017).

The social aspect of mentoring not only applies to relationships formed outside of the mentorship program, but also to relationships with their mentees and fellow mentors (Kohut, 2017). Becoming close with their fellow mentors was a benefit listed by all mentors who participated in the program (Kohut, 2017). Forming close social connections with their mentees was another major benefit observed with mentorship (Kohut, 2017). Not only was this social connection a benefit to the mentors, but it was also extremely important to the success of the mentorship program (Kohut, 2017). Once the social connection between mentor and mentee was formed, mentors noted a dramatic increase in emotional support between themselves and the mentee (Kohut, 2017). Furthermore, mentors stated that when parents joined in on calls between themselves and the mentee, there was a distinct disruption in the depth of the social connection formed (Kohut, 2017). This could prove that mentees view their relationship with their mentor a

private matter that they do not want their parents involved with. This could also mean that mentees are more likely to disclose personal and private information with their mentors, rather than their parents.

The final category of benefits noted by mentors after completing a mentorship program was professional benefits. Some of the most commonly reported benefits of pediatric mentoring include improvements in: collaborating with others, research dissemination, research tasks, professional development of mentor, development of the mentor's department or program, development of the field, professional networking, clinical service improvements, and learning about the next generation or keeping with the field (Canter, 2012). Based on this information, it seems as though mentorship has quite a large impact on a mentor's professional life. Not only does mentoring positively impact a mentor's current career, but it also has a positive impact on their future career by improving the number of professional connections they make throughout the course of the mentorship program (Canter, 2012). Additionally, mentors stated that their experiences throughout the program helped to further the field they were working in – psychology – and also helped influence the direction in which future research was headed (Canter, 2012). Finally, mentors said that the program helped them to improve the presentation of their research through publications, presentations, and other outlets (Canter, 2012).

Mentorship has been shown to have an immensely positive effect on both the mentor and the mentee. Through multiple research studies, it has been shown that benefits gained by the mentors and mentees alike are quite similar. Despite the fact that the mentorship programs were in different settings, different health-related fields, and some were not face-to-face, the benefits derived were remarkably similar. The age of a mentor ranged anywhere from 17-50+. and this had no effect on the benefits gained from the program or the success of the program.



Although existing research suggests that mentorship yields positive benefits for mentors, there are a limited number of studies confirming this, so it is possible there are benefits or drawbacks that have not yet been discovered. Furthermore, the impact of mentorship will likely be different based on the setting and the mentors participating. Not all mentoring programs are the same, so it is unlikely that the effects they have on participants will all be the same. Of the studies examining the impact of mentoring programs on mentors, most sampled adult mentors with minimal research examining college-aged mentors. In addition, few studies have evaluated the impact of mentoring on mentors in settings focused on health and fitness. Therefore, the current study is designed to examine the impact of Project Mentor on college-age students who serve as a mentor for overweight adolescents in a program designed to increase physical activity, improve nutrition, and teach healthy lifestyle skills.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were mentors from East Carolina University's "Project Mentor." Mentors (n=10) were between the ages of 20 and 24, and were currently enrolled as students at East Carolina University. Two of the mentors were male and eight were female. There was no incentive for participating in the interview, mentors agreed to the interview voluntarily.

### **Setting**

Project Mentor is a program at ECU where current ECU students mentor adolescents and children in an effort to improve their exercise and eating habits. The mentee's progress throughout the semester is tracked using Fitbit watches, various charts that are filled out by both the mentee and their mentor, pedometers to track the number of steps taken each night, and heart rate monitors.

Mentors work closely with their mentees, providing them with knowledge and encouragement to better help them succeed.

### **Procedures**

The mentors were the main focus of this research study. At the end of the semester, semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data from mentors who participated in Project Mentor. The main purpose of the interview was to assess the potential success of the program, and to evaluate any potential impacts the program had on the mentors. The semi-structured interview guide was designed to highlight three main categories: the personal impacts that Project Mentor had on each mentor, the social impacts that Project Mentor had on each mentor, and the professional impacts that Project Mentor had on each mentor. The "personal" category assessed the impacts Project Mentor had on the mentor's personal life, such as character traits and personal motivations. The "social" category focused on changes or impacts in the way the mentors interacted with others, and the relationships they formed during the program. The "professional" category assessed the impacts Project Mentor had on their current and future career goals.

### **Data analysis**

Each interview was recorded at the end of the fall semester and beginning of the spring semester, then transcribed at a later date. The transcribed interviews were then coded and analyzed, and the results grouped into the personal, social, or professional benefits category. A 2<sup>nd</sup> party also coded and analyzed the data to ensure the perceived results are unbiased. Transcribed interviews were coded using descriptive statistics. Deductive conceptual content analysis was used to analyze the open-ended qualitative responses provided by the mentors.

Initially, overarching categories of the expectations mentors had heading into the semester, personal development experienced by mentors throughout the semester, professional benefits or experiences had by mentors, and social interactions and relationships created throughout the semester by mentors were formed. These categories were then divided into subcategories. The category "expectations" was divided into subcategories that represented mentors' perceptions at the beginning of the semester of what the program would be like, including: hands on experience, helping others, career relevant experiences, fun, personal development, and forming relationships. The "personal" category reflected personal benefits that the mentors received such as improved confidence, feelings of fulfillment, better interpersonal skills, impact on own exercise/eating habits, more open minded, improved time management, and mental health. The "professional" category represented experiences that mentors thought would help them in a professional setting or in their future career, such as better self-awareness, focus, gained experience, reinforcement of classroom experiences, improved confidence in "soft" professional skills, improved confidence in exercise prescription, improved confidence in health counseling, overcoming obesity stereotypes, and shaping career interests. The "social" category represented social interactions throughout the semester and included forming relationships with mentee, forming relationships with other mentors, forming relationships with others, and the presence of a family-like atmosphere in the program.

All the categories and subcategories were specified based on prior knowledge of existing literature and responses given during interviews. Each one of the subcategories was then labeled using inductive descriptive coding. These codes were then used to label a section of text in the transcribed interviews that represented a specific concept. Two coders independently applied the finalized coding framework to each transcribed interview. The primary investigator and an

assistant investigator both coded the first transcribed interview entirely. After completely coding the first interview, the two coders compared their responses with one another, and reviewed all of the coded responses with two research faculty members at the university until a consensus was reached that all coded responses were coded appropriately. After thoroughly reviewing the codes of the first interview, the process was repeated for the second interview.

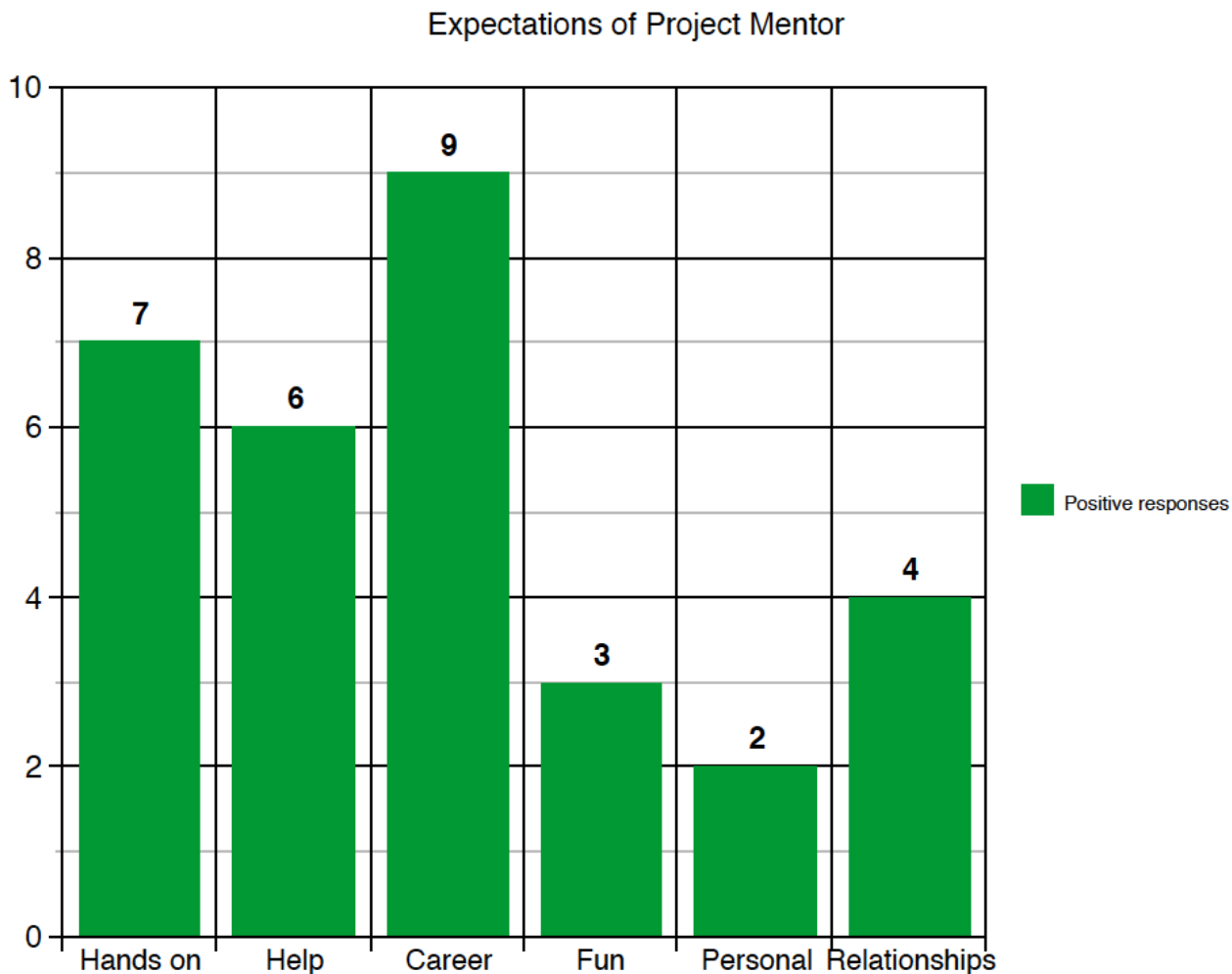
The two coders independently coded the second interview, then met with each other and two faculty members to review all coded responses. For the remaining eight interviews, the two coders independently coded four separate interviews each, emailed each other regarding points of discrepancy, and then met together with the two faculty members to ensure that all coded responses were accurately coded. Once all ten interviews were accurately coded and reviewed, the codes were alphabetized and the code "soft skills" was further subdivided into categories of "confidence," "flexible/adaptable," "fun," "people-oriented skills," and "tailor." These subcategories of soft skills were all re-coded to responses previously marked "soft skills." Once they were all coded by the primary investigator, they were reviewed by two research faculty members to ensure accurate coding.

## **Results**

After coding and analyzing all the transcribed interviews, some common themes appeared. Themes were developed based on mentor responses given during the interview process. Codes were then categorized based on the theme that they represented. The major themes that surfaced were expectations, career, soft skills, personal development, social, and challenges. As seen in the table below, each theme had a number of corresponding codes assigned to it, and each code was used to analyze the overarching theme.

Theme	Codes (number of mentors who mentioned code)	Description
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career (9)</li> <li>• Hands on (7)</li> <li>• Help (6)</li> <li>• Relationships (4)</li> <li>• Fun (3)</li> <li>• Personal (2)</li> </ul>	This cluster of codes describes the mentor's expectations heading into the program.
Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counseling (10)</li> <li>• Experience (9)</li> <li>• Prescription (8)</li> <li>• Classroom (7)</li> <li>• Self-awareness (7)</li> <li>• Professional goals (4)</li> </ul>	This cluster of codes describes how the program impacted the mentor's career.
Soft Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging/ support (8)</li> <li>• Flexible/ adaptable (6)</li> <li>• Tailor (6)</li> <li>• Fun (6)</li> <li>• Boundaries (6)</li> <li>• Empathy (6)</li> <li>• Confidence (5)</li> <li>• Patience (5)</li> <li>• Communication (5)</li> </ul>	This cluster of codes describes soft skills that the mentors learned/improved over the course of the semester.
Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reward (9)</li> <li>• Exercise (9)</li> <li>• Communication (8)</li> <li>• Mental (7)</li> <li>• Open minded (6)</li> <li>• Confidence (5)</li> <li>• Focus (4)</li> <li>• Stereotypes</li> </ul>	This cluster of codes describes how the mentors developed personally due to the impact of Project Mentor.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentee (9)</li> <li>• Family (9)</li> <li>• Mentors (8)</li> </ul>	This cluster of codes describes the different social relationships that mentors formed throughout the program.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges (8)</li> </ul>	This cluster of codes describes challenges that mentors encountered during the program.

## EXPECTATIONS



As shown from the above graph, the three most common expectations mentors had going into Project Mentor were to gain practical hands on experience (hands on), to gain career relevant experience (career), and to help others (help). The "hands on" category was coded to include responses that talked about choosing Project Mentor because the mentor wanted to gain a more personal, hands on experience. Project Mentor gives students a unique opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom, as one student said, "Well, I decided to be a mentor because you know I wanted to get active, really involved in school like the research and [Project Mentor] sounded really cool. I went to other professors to talk about their research and none of them really interested me as much as Project Mentor did. And I figured it would give me some good hands on

experience compared to some of the other stuff. So, I really wanted to do it because of the hands on experience."

The "career" category was similarly coded to the "hands on" category, but the major difference between the two is that the "career" category was focused more on how Project Mentor would impact the mentors' future career skills and experience. One mentor that fell into this category stated, "I wanted to gain interaction with a patient kind of experience because I'm a pre-med student, so I'm looking to go into the medical field. I thought that [it] was really important getting out of my comfort zone and talking to people one on one and really digging deep into conversation with them. So, that was the main thing I was hoping to learn from it." Almost every mentor interviewed mentioned choosing Project Mentor because of the career experience they hoped to gain. And while some mentors chose it based on the future possibilities, others chose it based on past experiences, as one mentor noted, "I wanted to gain more experience through it. I'm overweight myself, so I want to be a physician. But when I went to my physician, he was like, 'You need to lose weight,' but he didn't explain how to lose weight or anything, he just said 'You need to lose weight.' I want to be able to use that when I become a physician, so I can steer others towards the right direction."

Mentors who talked about choosing Project Mentor to help or serve others would fall into the "help" category. One student in the "help" category said, "I really like helping people and I thought it would be a really fun way to get kids to realize that exercise doesn't necessarily have to be so boring sometimes or just the gym, that they could do it at home too. So, I was really excited to make a difference in their lives. That's why I chose to do it."

More than 50% of the mentors interviewed mentioned at least one of the aforementioned categories when asked about their expectations heading into Project Mentor. Interestingly,

choosing Project Mentor because it sounded fun (fun), because mentors wanted to better themselves as a person (personal), or because mentors wanted to form new relationships (relationships) were mentioned by less than 50% of all mentors interviewed when discussing expectations going into the program. Mentors who mentioned "fun" as one of their expectations talked about choosing the program because it sounded like it would be fun or stress relieving. A mentor that fell under this category stated, "I was trying to get the most experience I could, and it seemed like it would be a fun way to get experience. It just seemed like something that would be rewarding and [make me] step out of my comfort zone a little bit."

The "personal" category covered mentor's talking about how they wanted to grow personally through the experience. This could be for physical reasons such as wanting to exercise more, or for personal/emotional reasons, such as wanting to develop certain character traits. One mentor that was leaning more towards the side of developing as a person said, "I liked being one on one with a person and you know whatever I was teaching them I kind of expected for myself to learn from them as well. So, I thought we'd both be learning and growing together, and I really liked that." Another student in the personal category chose Project Mentor for more physical reasons, saying, "I wanted to do something that was going to be active for myself." Despite the differences, both mentors fell into the "personal" category.

The "relationships" category was coded to include mentors who chose Project Mentor to develop new relationships with people. This could include their mentee, other mentors, or other people associated with the program. One mentor said this when asked why she chose Project Mentor over other courses offered: "I'm a very personable person and I like people interaction, so I thought [Project Mentor] would be a better choice for me versus being in a clinical setting."



These findings suggest that the primary motivating factor for joining Project Mentor was for gaining hands on experience that is applicable in future career settings. Since many mentors interviewed mentioned wanting a future career in personal training or other exercise-oriented careers, it is not surprising that they joined Project Mentor for the hands-on experience. Although the initial reason that mentors chose Project Mentor was to gain workplace experience, many mentors mentioned having a lot of fun and feeling rewarded or fulfilled at the end of the semester. One mentor even went so far as to say, "I definitely felt like this was one of my best semesters, I felt pretty fulfilled. I like to do community service, I've done a lot outside of school but this, because it's so hands on when I was with these kids for like 14 weeks, I truly got to see the difference we made."

Of the nine mentors who expected to gain workplace experience through Project Mentor, all nine of them reported that this expectation was met. In fact, one mentor stated, "it was really a great experience...my expectations were exceeded." Furthermore, of the seven mentors who were in the "hands on" category, all seven of them said that their expectations were met or exceeded. Although only 30% of mentors chose to participate in Project Mentor because it sounded fun, 70% of mentors reported having fun at the end of the semester. In addition, although only 40% of mentors joined Project Mentor with the expectation of forming relationships with other mentees/mentors, all mentors reported forming new relationships with others at the end of the semester. Many mentors were surprised by how close they became with their mentee, as one mentor stated, "To be honest, I didn't think I was going to get as close with my student as I did. From day one, he just opened up and talked to me which I didn't really expect. I figured he'd be more reserved. And I enjoyed going to project mentor three times a week. It was a lot of time

commitment, but I enjoyed going because I got to make a friend in the process and I did not expect that at all."

## **CAREER**

Mentors reported experiencing several benefits after participating in Project Mentor, one of them being career experience. Of the 6 original codes highlighting career-related benefits, 5 of them were mentioned by  $\geq 70\%$  of the mentors interviewed. The most common code mentioned was "counseling." Every single mentor interviewed mentioned learning new counseling skills or improving upon existing counseling skills after completing Project Mentor. Experience, prescription, classroom, and self-awareness were all mentioned by  $\geq 70\%$  of mentors. Professional goals was the least popular category, being mentioned by only 4 out of the 10 mentors interviewed.

In many exercise-related fields, counseling is a very important skill to possess. In the original coding sheet, "counseling" was used when the mentor talked about gaining confidence in skills related to counseling, motivational interviewing, or other one-on-one counseling techniques. These skills are crucial for professionals to become successful in career fields like personal training, athletic training, physical therapy, etc., because they allow them to connect with their client/patient and motivate them to the fullest potential.

While most people who decided to participate in Project Mentor did not foresee that they would gain counseling skills, it is quite clear that Project Mentor does an excellent job in developing counseling skills over the course of the program. One of the mentors stated, "Using the motivational interviewing techniques definitely became a lot easier, I found by the end of the program, I knew what kind of questions to ask and how to get my mentee to talk to me. I even

noticed myself using these with my friends outside of the program who aren't even in this major. We would be having conversations and I'd be trying to get them to tell me whatever I knew was going on and they'd end up telling me and look at me like, 'What the heck how did you do that?'"

Other mentors had similar experiences, but rather than make improvements getting their mentee to talk to them, they made improvements talking to their mentee. With this newfound confidence in talking to their mentee, one mentor related it to her future profession in dealing with personal training clients, saying, "I think I learned how to communicate really well with a client." This ties in quite well to the next topic of discussion: experience.

Experience was mentioned by 9 out of the 10 mentors that were interviewed and is likely a contributing factor to why each mentor decided to join in the first place. Workplace experience is something that many college students are looking for, and Project Mentor is a great place to gain that experience. One student highlighted how relevant Project Mentor was for career experience, saying, "Even in my internship now, I have to create plans for my students and I think using my skills that I learned at Project Mentor and having to be able to adapt to different students and their abilities has really helped me in my internship." Another student seemed to agree, saying, "I would definitely recommend the program. I think being a mentor was super beneficial to my professional development and even my personal development."

The next most mentioned code was "prescription," which was brought up by 7 out of 10 mentors. This code included mentors who talked about Project Mentor improving their skills in creating exercise prescriptions for their mentees. One of the mentors summarized it perfectly, stating, "I definitely felt a lot more confident about being able to go in and run an exercise program or prescription for a couple hours every week." This confidence is essential when making exercise prescriptions in the professional workplace.

The next section, “classroom,” focused primarily on how Project Mentor improved mentors’ experiences in class. Seven out of ten mentors mentioned such improvements, which serves as an excellent testament to how effective Project Mentor is at helping students understand classroom topics. One student noted this improvement in understanding, saying, “My grades have been better this semester than they have in the past.”

One of the most interesting codes was “self-awareness,” which was used when the mentor talked about developing an awareness of their personal skills/abilities related to future career, exercise prescription, or health counseling. Surprisingly, 7 out of 10 mentors talked about experiencing heightened self-awareness after participating in Project Mentor. The main reason this was surprising is because it was assumed that most of the mentors would already be aware of their personal skill set, but this seemed to not be the case. Some things mentors mentioned they learned about themselves included a “passion for helping people,” that they were “better at motivating people than they thought,” and that they “had a passion for exercise.”

“Professional goals” was the least talked about category and was defined as: Mentor talks about how this experience shaped professional interests, goals, or career plans. Many mentors stated that they already knew what they were going to do before joining Project Mentor, so this could explain why so few mentors talked about it.

## **SOFT SKILLS**

In addition to career benefits, mentors reported experiencing multiple benefits in the category labeled “soft skills.” Soft skills encompasses non-prescription skills related to exercise prescription. These include providing support and encouragement to mentees, being flexible and

adaptable, showing empathy towards others, tailoring exercise programs, making exercises and activities fun for mentees, laying out boundaries, instilling confidence in themselves and other, being patient, and having good communication with mentees and mentors.

The most mentioned code was “encouraging/support,” which was when mentors spoke to their mentees using encouraging or supportive language or had a positive attitude around their mentee. This is unsurprising after observing the atmosphere surrounding Project Mentor. Everyone is very enthusiastic and optimistic, which makes for a very positive atmosphere for the mentees. One mentor commented on how Project Mentor impacted her attitude, saying, “I think it helped me try to have a better attitude going into certain stuff like trying to be positive even when you get discouraged, you have to see the good in stuff.” This was pretty much every mentor’s mentality who went to Project Mentor. Another mentor recalled how this encouragement affected the mentees when he said, “You get to see the kids get excited. I know a lot of them couldn't even do a squat, so we had a section teaching them how to squat and after learning that skill, they got so excited about it. They consider you like a professional in exercise so if you're commending them then they get really happy about it. I really liked seeing their excitement.”

The next two sections - “Flexible/adaptable” and “Tailor” - both had similar premises but were slightly different in definition. “Flexible/adaptable” primarily focused on the mentor’s being willing to make changes to their daily schedule to accommodate their mentee, whereas “tailor” was more concentrated on making changes to their mentees schedule and exercise regimen based on the individual mentee. Six out of the ten mentors interviewed mentioned both of the categories. Since the flexible/adaptable code involved mentors making smaller, day-to-day changes, it was not uncommon for them to talk about doing spontaneous exercises or modifying exercises/activities to better benefit their mentee. One mentor recalled modifying a game of

dodgeball to be more active, saying, “They initially told us no dodgeball because it's standing around, but he really liked that game, so I'd turn it into like if you get hit then you have to do 15 jumping jacks. If you catch a ball, then that person has to do 15 jumping jacks. I'd change it every week or every day.” While “tailor” is similar to “flexible/adaptable,” one of the most obvious differences is how “tailor” is more long-term, so to speak. When asked what the key to becoming a successful mentor was, one mentor stated, “Just becoming more open, realizing that people aren't the same. You can't make the same plan for one person and then try to use it for somebody else because that won't work. I got to work with a bunch of different mentees since my mentee wasn't there on Mondays and there was one girl, she loved to play basketball, that's how she exercised. But you take my mentee, he wouldn't pick up a basketball if you told him ‘Hey, that's what you've got to do,’ he wouldn't do it. And I mean it's just learning that people are different.”

The next most-mentioned code was “fun.” This was encouraging to see, because having fun is something that Project Mentor really emphasizes throughout the semester. Mentors who mentioned this code made a conscious effort to make activities – specifically, exercise – more enjoyable for their mentees. One mentor had an interesting approach, saying, “If you ask any of the other mentees or mentors, they'll probably tell you I was the one that was always obnoxiously like, “You can do it, come on,” like yelling and jumping around and just being crazy. I mean, Dr. Raedeke will tell you, ‘The crazier you are and the more you engage and make it fun for them, the more likely they're able to respond well.’ So, that's what I would do. I would play music while we were doing stairs that day. I'd play Eye of the Tiger and I knew it used to make [my mentee] crazy but hearing it does get them going.” This is just one example of how mentors made activities more fun for their mentee. Another mentor took a different approach, saying, “Be creative. Learn how

to make things fun because running on a treadmill is not fun. I hate it too so I can't blame him when he hates it. So, yeah, definitely make games and make different rewards and stuff like that.”

While making activities fun is an important component of Project Mentor, many mentors also mentioned that it is important to establish boundaries. Mentors who mentioned the code “boundaries” talked about setting boundaries in their relationship with their mentee. One of the most important boundaries mentors recognized needed to be set was drawing a line between being their mentee’s friend and being their mentor. As one mentor keenly pointed out, “There's definitely a line. One thing that the kids struggle with is they want to be your friend on social media and they want to have your snapchat and....no, no absolutely not; not until they're out of the program. So, I think that's like the golden rule for not stepping over the line. But also, if you give them respect, they're gonna give you respect. And understanding how to be that disciplinary [figure] without being their parent because they go home and they have their parents telling them what to do, that's a challenge. But you also don't want them walking all over you.” Many other mentors who mentioned the code “boundaries” talked about similar struggles. The line between being a mentor and being a friend was a difficult one to draw.

“Empathy” was the next most popular code mentioned by mentors who were interviewed. It was coded when a mentor talked about being in tune with their mentee’s emotions or mood, and when they tried to make their mentee feel better on days they didn’t want to be there. Six out of the ten mentors interviewed mentioned empathy, making it a very important aspect of the program. One mentor talked about how essential this quality was, saying, “We really had to be in touch with their emotions and very receptive to how they're feeling that day. If they're having a bad day, the last thing we were gonna do is yell at them. I don't think any of us have ever yelled at a mentee. There were definitely frustrating times, but we never wanted to make them feel unwelcome or like

they were being punished because that would just take away from what they've learned already.” This is an excellent example of the mindset that each mentor had throughout the semester of Project Mentor.

The next code, “confidence,” was talked about by half of the mentors who were interviewed. Mentors who talked about this code mentioned feeling more confident interacting with their mentee, creating exercise programs for their mentee, or an overall confidence in their abilities in a professional setting. One mentee touched on her improvements in her confidence levels, saying, “Once I gained that confidence...seeing that I can interact with my mentee and gaining those skills of learning how to train her and stuff like that, I started getting more confident with that and interacting with people in general.” Improving confidence levels not only applied within Project Mentor, but often carried over into the real world, as mentioned by the mentor above.

“Patience” was also mentioned by half of the mentors interviewed and was a skill many of the mentors thought was essential to becoming a successful mentor. One mentor who thought she was prepared to be a mentor was surprised, as she explained, “I definitely learned a lot of patience. Working with kids is not easy and I'm the oldest of 5 so I thought it was going to be easy, but it wasn't.” Another mentor, when asked what the keys to becoming a successful mentor were, replied, “I'd say the keys to success are to be patient, have fun, listen, don't get frustrated, enjoy the process, be ok with starting over, and...yeah just really have fun.” It is interesting to note that being patient was the first trait mentioned when asked how to be successful. Clearly, patience was very important to many of the mentors in Project Mentor.

The final code in the soft-skills category is “communication.” Communication was also mentioned by half of the mentors interviewed. The code was written down when a mentor talked



about improving his/her communication skills in a professional setting, learning what is/isn't appropriate to say in a professional setting, or improvements made in explaining concepts to their mentee. One mentor alluded to the fact that listening is important to becoming better at communication, saying, "It takes getting to know someone and being open. You have to be a very good listener to understand what they want and need out of the program." As mentioned by this mentor, understanding and listening to her mentee was crucial in giving them the success they desired from the program.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The development of different soft skills is one of the major benefits from Project Mentor, but it's not the only one. The development of personal skills is another important benefit provided by Project Mentor. Personal development is a highly valuable attribute of a program, so it was highly encouraging to see that all ten of the mentors mentioned developing personally over the course of the program.

The most mentioned code was "reward," which was defined as when mentors talked about feeling fulfilled or rewarded during or after the program. The vast majority of mentors who mentioned feeling rewarded said that it was due to their mentee's success, as one mentor recalled his experience, saying, "One of the most memorable things that happened is, it was actually the last day, it's the last part and we decided to just have some fun we went and we found these foam hockey sticks and we went out on the tennis courts and were running around hitting tennis balls with the foam hockey sticks. It was getting towards Christmas, and I had printed off a certificate for him and got it framed. It said, "semester's best mentee" and I gave it to him and he was so

surprised that I got him something. It made him really happy and I wrote a letter to him at the end telling him all the stuff I learned from him and he really liked that. But when he got the present I gave him, his face lit up and it was great.” These fulfilling and rewarding feelings often stemmed from mentors seeing their mentees have success in the program, or from seeing their mentees simply enjoying themselves. Another mentor highlighted this, saying, “I really liked seeing [my mentee's] excitement for [the program] and then when she started working out at home on her own without me having to tell her, it was really rewarding to see.” Finally, one mentor talked about how her experience with the program helped shape her personal development by humbling her and making her feel rewarded for all of her hard work. She said, “It's rewarding, not only for the kid but also for yourself because you learn a lot about who you are and how you deal with others. You really put forth an effort and change is a really rewarding and humbling experience.”

“Exercise” was mentioned by 9 out of the 10 mentors interviewed. The code was recorded when mentors talked about improving their eating habits/nutrition because of being a mentor. Project Mentor spends a lot of time focusing on the importance of proper nutrition and exercise, and these results are indicative of that. One reason why mentors often mentioned improving their exercise/eating habits was to avoid appearing hypocritical to their mentee. One mentor mentioned this, stating, “I'm overweight myself and when he was working out, I started working out more and I tried to eat healthier. I didn't want to be a hypocrite telling him, ‘Hey, you have to do this’ and then go and eat Bojangles.” This is interesting see, because although the focus of Project Mentor is on improving the mentees’ eating and exercise habits, 9 of the 10 mentors interviewed improved their own exercise and eating habits as a direct result of the program. One mentor got very personal with her story of how Project Mentor improved her exercise and eating habits, saying, “I had a surgery 6 years ago and afterwards it was super hard for me mentally and I just

stopped giving a shit and I didn't take care of myself. [After the program] I feel a lot better about myself and it feels very rewarding because sometimes it sucks eating the same meal you cook on Sunday, but I feel so much better about myself. I'm not as self-conscious and [I'm] a lot more confident in who I am because I'm taking care of myself now.”

Communication is an essential trait for successful mentors and was the second most mentioned code in the personal development section. It was recorded when mentors talked about noticing improvements in their communication skills in non-professional settings. One of the mentor's talked about overcoming her shyness through improved communication and people-skills, saying, “6 or 7 months ago now I considered myself more of a shy person, so I was really hesitant. Like I don't know this kid, I don't know where he comes from, what he's about, what he doesn't like...I'm thrown with this kid and he has to be with me all semester. So, it kinda freaked me out but it opened this door for me to be able to be personable with someone. I could be more personable, get out of that shyness stage that I had, and it really almost gave me more people skills than I thought it would ever have.” Another mentee noted how the program helped her make improvements in her communication skills as well. She stated, “I think [the program] helped me grow a lot personally and it helped me get better with talking with people. And going back to the meetings we had every week and stuff, that helped me [too].”

This mentor's improvements in communication is also an excellent example of an improvement in confidence, because many of them lacked confidence in their communication skills. Confidence was a code mentioned by half of the mentors interviewed as a personal trait they developed. It was coded when mentors talked about improvements in their own personal confidence or how they grew/developed as a person over the course of the program. One mentor illustrated this point well, stating, “I feel a lot more confident and comfortable now working one

on one with someone and I think [the program] really prepares you to be in a more professional structured environment with exercise.” Many of the other mentors who talked about improvements in confidence mentioned that the most important factor in improving confidence levels was getting out of their comfort zone.

“Mental health” was a code mentioned by 7 out of the ten mentors interviewed and was coded when mentors would talk about improvements in their mental health as a direct result of participating in Project Mentor. These improvements included talking points like feelings of escape, enjoyment, stress relief, etc. Project Mentor served as a place of relief for many mentors, as one described it, saying, “The nights that you are like, ‘Ugh, I don't want to go, I have a test tomorrow’...those end up being the best nights to go because it just gets you out of the stressful element. When I got back home, I always felt so relaxed and calm and ready to take on whatever.” Another mentor said, “It really honestly became one of my favorite parts of the day. No matter how stressful my day was or how tired I was, getting to fool around for an hour was a lot of fun.” Many of the mentors interviewed talked about how great the program was for relieving stress and having fun.

In addition to enjoying the benefits that Project Mentor had on their mental health, 60% of mentors interviewed talked about how the program made them more open-minded regarding obesity stereotypes and things of that nature. The definition of the code was “Mentor talks about becoming more open minded or understanding of people because of their experiences with their mentee or involvement in Project Mentor.” While none of the mentors interviewed explicitly revealed that they had any sort of biased expectations in working with overweight adolescents, many of them mentioned that it was different from what they expected. One mentor talked about how her views changed throughout the semester, saying, “It sounds really bad but before I went

into it, I kinda pitied them and that's not how you should think. But I was also just a junior and I hadn't started any major classes and I thought oh they're probably bullied, or they're depressed, and I hope I can be that shining end of the dark hole or whatever...but now I realize that they're just people and they just want to feel normal. I started realizing it's really not about the weight, it's not about the number. It's about how you feel; how confident you are in yourself and your abilities and who you are. So, I think that's what changed the most for me.” Another mentor talked about how the program helped him to open his mind, saying, “It's helped open my eyes that as time goes on, kids are becoming more overweight and it's a serious problem and it's not their fault, it's just the culture they grew up in. It was really eye opening.”

The final code in the personal development category was focus. This code was recorded when a mentor talked about controlling his/her emotional state or putting aside his/her own needs to focus on the mentee/task/goals during a session. This is a very important trait for individuals going into health-related fields to possess, but it is also a valuable trait in everyday life. Focusing on other people, rather than oneself, and being able to compartmentalize personal problems is an important skill in an individual's personal development. One mentor summarized this by stating, “You have to be a pretty energetic, happy person, or even if you're not having a good day, be able to turn it off for an hour and not make the kids miserable.” The ability to focus on the client is very important in healthcare, and Project Mentor provides valuable experience in this area of the field. Another mentor talked about her experience with focus, saying, “You need to be able to cope and deal with when the kids have bad days or when I'm having a bad day and not letting that interfere with the hour and a half that we're spending together each night.”

## **SOCIAL**

The “social” category was formed to encompass the different types of social interactions and relationships fostered through Project Mentor. After interviewing the mentors who participated in the program, three main codes were formed to fit into this category: mentee, family, and mentors. These three codes represent the majority of social interactions experienced by the mentors over the course of the program.

The first code, “mentee,” was used when a mentor would talk about the relationship they formed with their mentee. This oftentimes included their mentee, but it could also apply to other mentees that they interacted with throughout the semester. Nearly all of the mentors interviewed – 9 out of 10 – mentioned this code. When asked what she would remember the most about Project Mentor, one mentor replied, “Probably the experiences with my mentee, like us exercising together, the highlights, him increasing his performance on the pacer, stuff like that. Seeing him really happy because he accomplished something. The coyote challenge that we did, he improved his time by like 5 minutes throughout the thing and he was super excited about it. Stuff like that is the stuff that will stick with me the most.” Another mentor was surprised by how close she got with her mentee, saying, “To be honest, I didn't think I was going to get as close with my student as I did. From day one, he just opened up and talked to me, which I didn't really expect, I figured he'd be more reserved. And I enjoyed going to project mentor three times a week. I mean, it was a time commitment, but I enjoyed going because I got to make a friend in the process and I did not expect that at all.”

“Family” was coded when mentors talked about the cohesiveness of individuals involved in the program as a whole, or when they described the atmosphere of the program as warm and accepting. All but one of the mentors interviewed mentioned this code, which shows that this was a very prominent aspect of Project Mentor for nearly everyone who participated. To some mentors,

this family-like atmosphere was surprising, as one mentor noted, “I definitely did not expect it to be so much of like a family atmosphere.” Another mentor noticed how much the program resembled a family, saying, “The mentors became their own family, the mentees became their own family, then we kinda became like a group family. Everyone got along so well, which made it even easier. There wasn't any animosity or fighting between the kids.” This type of atmosphere is exactly what Project Mentor is all about.

The last code - “mentors” - was mentioned by 8 out of the ten mentors interviewed. It was coded when a mentor talked about forming relationships with their fellow mentors in the program. One mentor enjoyed the program and forming new relationships immensely. When asked what he thought about his semester at Project Mentor, he replied, “I loved it. I loved it. It was probably my best semester, just because you have to interact with the people. I made a ton of friends through it because, in the other classes I take, I sit in the back of class and don't talk to anybody because the lecture's going on. So, I mean, it's just...it was the highlight of my semester.” Another mentor talked about how he learned something new about himself by making lifelong friends, saying, “I definitely learned that I'm more of a people person than I thought I would be. Sometimes, I'm really shy and I'm kinda just by myself and that's totally fine for me. [But] I made a ton of friends [through the program] and I didn't think that I would make those friendships that would last forever. I went to some girl's formal with her because she didn't have a date, now she's getting married and I'm going to her wedding.”

These lasting, impactful relationships formed through Project Mentor show how effective the program is at creating meaningful relationships and social interactions amongst mentors and mentees alike. Nearly every mentor interviewed talked about forming new relationships with their

mentees, as well as their fellow mentors. This shows how crucial the social aspect of Project Mentor is for both the mentors and the mentees.

## **CHALLENGES**

Despite the fact that there are many positive aspects to Project Mentor, it is not without its fair share of challenges. Of the ten mentors interviewed, eight of them talked about experiencing challenges throughout the semester. These challenges could include anything from challenges with their mentee, other mentors, the time commitment, training sessions, etc. One mentor described a challenging aspect for her, saying, “It felt pretty repetitive which, I mean, I can't really expect anything more or less, I guess. But sometimes it did feel like the same old, same old coming in every day, so sometimes that was a little challenging.” Another mentor talked about some challenges she encountered with her mentee, saying, “For me, I feel like the most challenging aspect was two things: one, when he'd get around his friends, he'd slack off and joke around. There was nothing wrong with him being in a group setting, it's just sometimes the boys would get a little rowdy and slack off. And then another thing was the nutritional aspect of it. Since we're not dieticians, I can't really tell him what to do, but it was hard making suggestions because he's young and he's not the one choosing where he eats and he gets the free meals at school so he's kinda stuck in that situation where he can't have too much of a say in what he eats.”

While most of the mentors who participated in Project Mentor mentioned encountering challenges, this is not uncommon and should likely be expected. The pros vastly outnumbered the cons when interviewing mentors from the program. Some of the challenges mentioned by the mentors provide valuable feedback for improving the program in the future, and other challenges



are based on individual experiences. Both types of challenges are important for bettering Project Mentor in the future.

## **Discussion**

The main purpose of this research was to evaluate what kind of impact Project Mentor had on the mentors who participated in the program. There has been extensive research in past literature focusing on the impact that mentor-style programs have had on the *mentees* who participated, but very little information is available regarding what kind of impact these programs have on *mentors*. The research conducted in this paper has uncovered multiple underlying themes that have impacted the mentors in differing ways; both positive and negative. Virtually all the positive themes were contained within the expectations, career, soft skills, personal development, and social categories. The negative responses were found primarily in the challenges category.

Project Mentor has had a substantial impact on the mentors who participated in the program. Every single mentor who participated in this study said that they would recommend becoming a mentor to because they enjoyed the semester and gained new skills through the mentoring experience. Project Mentor has been shown to have had a positive impact on both the mentors as well as the mentees who participated, both mentally and physically. Although there were numerous challenges associated with the program, the feedback in support of Project Mentor has been overwhelmingly positive. Mentors who participated in the program mentioned many different benefits resulting from Project Mentor, from personal development in everyday life, to skill development that could be used in their future career path. These benefits included increased confidence in professional settings, improved experience, improved communication skills in both professional and non-professional settings, increased levels of confidence, etc.

The design and layout of Project Mentor is likely one of the key factors for its success. Mentors are trained extensively in motivational interviewing techniques that are aimed at increasing internal motivation levels in mentees. Mentors attend weekly training sessions to practice these interviewing techniques, as well as to discuss any challenges they may be encountering with their mentee or with the program in general. Multiple mentors talked about how these training sessions prepared them well for meeting with their mentees each week. These training sessions allowed mentors to gain experience and interact with their fellow mentors, giving them the confidence, knowledge, and support necessary for success. Furthermore, Project Mentor gave mentors a lot of flexibility when creating an exercise session for their mentee. Mentors who fell into the “flexible/adaptable” category mentioned how important being flexible was. This flexibility gave them the opportunity to create the best possible exercise program for their mentee. It also allowed them to think outside the box and come up with creative new ways for their mentees to reach their exercise goals. Mentors in the “tailor” category of soft skills used creative thinking to come up with unique exercise programs for their mentees. All of these different characteristics implemented into Project Mentor gave mentors the experience, skills, and freedom to be successful and experience positive outcomes.

Pre-existing research has shown that being mentoring provides numerous benefits to the mentors. These include, but are not limited to, improvements in confidence, communication skills, GPA, social skills, mental health, soft skills, exercise prescription skills, career-readiness, and open-mindedness (Tierney, 1992; Canter, 2012; Holloman, 2013). Nearly all of these themes were evident in Project Mentor, but there were a few exceptions. One of these exceptions was improvements in GPA. Although a few of the mentors interviewed talked about improved classroom experiences, none of them specifically talked about improvements in their GPA. Past

research also provided strong evidence that mentorship programs had a significant impact on the mentor's social skills, such as communication skills, outgoingness, and self-confidence (Holland-Carter, 2017). Although this was evident in existing research, the effect was much less significant in mentors from Project Mentor.

Despite minor differences, the findings of this research are relatively consistent with existing literature on similar mentor programs. In past research, mentors in mentor programs experienced a variety of benefits, while also encountering minimal challenges or negative experiences. Benefits derived from being a mentor included mental benefits as well as physical benefits and were not limited to within the program. One of the physical benefits that was unique to Project Mentor were the improvements in the mentors' health behaviors. Ninety percent of mentors interviewed reported making improvements to their exercise and/or eating habits during and/or after the program. These findings were not evident in past research. However, outside research has revealed that mentors also experienced benefits outside of mentoring programs in the form of self-confidence and self-efficacy (Weiler, 2013). Furthermore, past research has shown that mentors often experienced psychological benefits, such as improvements in self-esteem, confidence, communication skills, etc (Cooke, 2017; Weiler, 2013). These findings also held true in our research.

Although Project Mentor provided many benefits to its mentors, it was not without its fair share of challenges. A number of mentors mentioned some difficulties associated with their mentees. Not all mentees who attend the program are motivated to change, so some mentors found it challenging to make any progress with them in their exercise sessions, or with the counseling sessions. Additionally, mentors said it was difficult talking to their mentees about making diet changes. This is because Project Mentor implemented take-home informational packets for

mentees to fill out or use when they were not attending the program. However, it was difficult to motivate mentees to complete these packets, as many of them viewed it as “homework.” Furthermore, most of the mentees simply were unable to make significant changes to their diets, because their parents were in charge of grocery shopping and what they ate. Many mentors suggested making changes to this aspect of the program, which Project Mentor did the following semester by removing the take-home packets for mentees from the program.

In addition to the above changes, many mentors suggested adjusting some of the group games. A few mentors mentioned that some of the group games resulted in many of the mentees standing around rather than running around and participating. Another suggestion for improving the program involved shortening the length of the weekly training sessions, because they seemed redundant at times. Despite these negative aspects of the program, the majority of feedback was positive.

Some strengths of this study were being able to host one-on-one interviews with mentors from the program. Mentors were very honest about their experiences and spoke of both the good and the bad parts of Project Mentor. The process of coding and analyzing interviews was extremely thorough and was accomplished by four individuals; two faculty, a grad student, and an undergraduate student. Codes were analyzed 2-4 times to ensure they were being applied accurately. Experienced faculty members monitored progress and provided any necessary assistance, while also helping to create and apply codes to the transcribed interviews. Lastly, the individuals interviewed were interviewed within a month or two of completing the program to ensure accurate information was gathered.

Limitations of this study include the fact that we were unable to interview every single mentor from the program. We were also unable to interview mentors from past semesters to follow

up with them and see how the program impacts them now, if at all. Some of the mentors interviewed may not have given completely accurate answers. Certain codes developed may not have perfectly fit some of the statements given during interviews and some assumptions may have been made when coding certain statements. Finally, we did not follow up with any of the mentors interviewed, so we are unable to see what kind of impact participating in the program may have had on them post-Project Mentor.

The future direction of this type of research should be centered on the lasting effects of mentoring programs on mentors, as research on this subject is limited. Although this study has confirmed many findings from past research, there is still not a lot of research surrounding the subject of mentoring program effects on mentors. Lastly, future research should focus on maximizing the benefits discussed in this study and others for the mentors who participate.

This study has shown that mentors who have participated in Project Mentor experience many benefits. The findings of this study are consistently in alignment with pre-existing literature and help to add to the lack of knowledge surrounding the effects of mentoring programs on the mentors in the program. Overall, Project Mentor is viewed as a highly successful program where mentors can experience a positive atmosphere and make progress in their own personal and professional development.

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