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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to find out whether there were higher retention rates amongst students of color at UW-Superior who participated in the peer mentoring program compared to those who didn't participate during the program years of 2011 and 2012.

The Peer Mentoring Program was designed in 2011 at UWS to transition students of color and help them be successful. The students who participated in the program during Fall 2011 were retained at 100% for one year then dropped to 86% by Spring 2013 compared to the non-participants that were retained at 70% then dropped to 46% by Spring 2013. The students who participated in the program during Fall 2012 were retained at 100% through Spring 2013 versus the non-participants who were retained at 68%. Therefore, this program seems to be successful at both retaining and helping students succeed.

Introduction

The University of Wisconsin-Superior's Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) (2013) focuses their mission on serving students of color because they want to see an increase in retaining those students. They have developed programs to accomplish their mission, one being the peer mentoring program that was developed in 2011.

The OMA's mission statement is: "dedicated to the academic and social success of African American, American Indian, Asian American and Hispanic/Latino [sic] students while fostering a climate of respect for all people and cultures. This office will also provide the following for students: A home away from home atmosphere, opportunities throughout the year for career and personal development, promoting cultural awareness programs, advisement, and be connected with their peers" (UWS & OMA, 2013).

The Peer Mentoring Program's mission statement is: "The University of WI – Superior Office of Multicultural Affairs Peer Mentor program's mission is to assist incoming students of color in their transition to college by creating an environment which encourages their success and meets their individual needs. This program will also help students in the following areas: New friends, new opportunities, resume builder, a new sense of success, connection to school, reciprocity, free food, and monetary stipend" (UWS & OMA, 2013). This program is also grant funded and is limited to ten students.

Review of the Literature

Peer Mentoring, retention, and the relationship between the two will be explored in the following paragraphs.

Different Types of Mentoring

Mullen and Lick (1999) introduces student-to-student mentoring as a group of people brainstorming together to make themselves knowledgeable of each other so they each can support each other. In Megginson et al. (2006), they explained that peer-to-peer mentoring tells that one peer is the one to see the big picture and details of the project while the other one sees the system and ethics of it. There are many types of mentoring that can be categorized in different ways, but this research specifically focuses on peer-to-peer mentoring and retention.

Peer Mentoring

As described by the OMA's Peer Mentorship Program, peer mentoring is a relationship between the upper class mentor and the new freshman mentee. Mentors are resources for any questions or concerns first-year students may have. Knowing and building a friendship with an experienced peer on campus will give mentees opportunities to participate in fun social events and student organizations. Mentor-mentee teams often or are expected to contact each other once a week for the first semester and participate in monthly group meetings with everyone in the program. This aspect will give the incoming student a great sense of community and a comfortable campus environment.

Mullen and Lick (1999) points out that the culture of mentoring falls within processing mentorships and how it applies to the ethics and values of a mentor and mentee. The research goes on to say that the mentors and mentees process differences within their own culture and mentors usually research about their mentee and their culture before or after they have met to familiarize themselves with their mentee better.

Peer Mentoring as a Relationship

Elements of mentoring consist of building a relationship between the mentor and mentee meant that the mentor would be the listener and the mentee would be the speaker. Although, the mentee is already an expert in their own life, they still need the mentor's guidance to reach their specific goals (Johnson & Ridley, 2004, p. 43). Johnson and Ridley (2004) state that the mentor is like a second shadow to the mentee. It is like being another clone of the mentee and letting them teach the mentor about themselves while the mentor learns. The mentor will lean their ears forward to let their protégés speak out of mind, giving them opportunity to become familiarize with their story and give them the strength to become successful in whatever they do.

Peer Mentoring and Students of Color

Peer mentoring seems helpful to students of color because it builds an important relationship with another student to transition them to college life. Peers build knowledge through relationships and self-confidence through working with the person of the same ethnicity as them. Peer factors that influence students' intellectual self-confidence and degree aspirations operate differently by race. It seems that students of color are validated by interacting closely with other non-White students. Students of color reframe their psyche "in a non White [sic] frame [which] may make group diversity as influential, and in some cases, more influential than academic competencies or self-esteem in group" (Shotton et al., 2007, p. 90). Women of color seek others like themselves, not only as a way to develop a positive ethnic or racial self-image but also as "a respite from racial and/or [sic] ethnic hypersensitivity and

hostility and in addition exchange academic information and support" (Shotton et al., 2007, p.85).

Retention of Students of Color

Retention of students of color is a typical problem at universities, including UWS (UW-system & OPAR, 2013, p. 2). The UW-System are still working on increasing the number of Wisconsin graduates and retention through stretching the education opportunities (UW-system & OPAR, 2013, p. 1). This article further explained that they "have a goal of raising retention and graduation rates for all students of all races/ethnicities [sic]."

American Indians have been admitted to college at a rate higher than that of other ethnic or racial groups; however, far fewer American Indians graduate (Shotton et al.,2007, p. 92). The mentees stressed that relationship was an important part in developing connectedness with their mentors. Furthermore, they explained that a Peer-Mentoring Retention Program was first successful in retaining their students because of their mentors who showed genuine interest, competency, commitment to the relationship, caring, humanity, and willingness to support mentees.

Retention of Students of Color at UWS

Retention of students of color is described as retaining the student to stay enrolled at the university and graduate in their program of interest (Shotton et al.,2007, p. 82). In the 2010 UW-Superior's Growth Agenda Accountability Report, it showed the retention of new freshman entering the University of Wisconsin – Superior in Fall 2010 (2nd Year). In the data, the underrepresented minority group showed that 23 students were retained at 65% and the total new freshman group showed that 369 students were retained at 68% between the years of

2009 and 2010. From the report, it shows that retention of students of color is a typical problem at universities, including the University of Wisconsin - Superior.

This research will examine the connection between peer mentoring programs and retention amongst students of color rates who were newly enrolled at the University of Wisconsin – Superior between 2011 and 2012.

Connection between Mentoring and Retention

The mentoring program entitled, "Stops the bleeding only long enough to send friends back into battle," were structured peer groups where American Indian students "tied hands" to work through their education together (Shotton et al., 2007, p. 95). This research tells how mentoring programs helped retain students by building trust and making relationships stronger. Shotton et al. (2007) also state that minority students came into agreement that they were successful and academically achieved their education because of the peer support they received from each other.

Cropper (2000) points out that African American students succeeded in college im part because they participated in mentoring which provided them with the great and inspirational mentors that they had when there was no one else to turn to. Cropper (2000) conducted research which included: Focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires. The purpose of this research was to get feedback on the effectiveness of mentoring from the students to determine whether program helped the students or not. They learned that those African American students who were involved in the mentoring scheme were retained the following semester and graduated.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this research was to determine whether the participants of the peer mentoring program have higher rates of retention compared to the eligible students of color who did not participate the program years of 2011 and 2012. This research was intended to help the Peer Mentorship program because it would give them a better perspective of whether the OMA is achieving their mission.

Methodology

Population

The research sample did include new students of color who were enrolled at the University of Wisconsin – Superior during the 2011 school year. There were 74 peer and non-peer students who were enrolled in 2011 and 80 in 2012. For the purposes of this research, a student of color is defined as any student who identifies themselves in one or more of these categories: Hispanic or Latino, African American, Asian American, or American Indian.

Secondary Data Collection Techniques and Rationale

The secondary data was compiled by the Department of Institutional Research Department at UWS with agreement with the Office of Multicultural Affairs. The data was received as an Excel spreadsheet.

The Department of Institutional Research released data for two cohorts; cohort one and two. The first data are for cohort one, which are data for students of color who participated in the Peer Mentoring program Fall 2011 through Spring 2012 and retention of these students Spring 2012, Fall 2012, and Spring 2013. The second data are for cohort two, which are data for students of color who were enrolled as new students to UWS during Fall 2011 but were not

enrolled in the Peer Mentoring program Fall 2011 through Spring 2012 and retention of these students Spring 2012 and Fall 2012.

Validity and Reliability

This research demonstrates criterion validity because it is using retention as a way to measure success of students of color which in the same way as the measure used by UWS. This research demonstrated reliability because the data that was compiled used specific variables that could be used by other researchers in the future. Student success depends on data and retention, because it is true that the student is achieving academically if they are staying the following semester, year, and graduate. If not, institutions must re-evaluate on how they are going to help their students be more successful so they are retained.

Human Diversity Issues, Ethics and Values, and Social Justice

Human Diversity Issue

This research showed a positive effect on human diversity because it specifically focused on students of color and that they needed programs like the Peer Mentorship to help them be a more successful individual academically. Nevertheless, the peer mentoring program was not the only resource why students succeeded educationally. This research demonstrates how important human diversity issues were because it revolved around inclusive excellence. The OMA defined inclusive excellence as a focus on programs, events, and opportunities, which help faculty, staff, and students from underrepresented groups get connected to each other, specific departments/offices/programs, or to the campus as a whole. Inclusive excellence was and still is something that every university strives for, especially the OMA at UWS. Inclusive excellence is an important factor in human diversity issues, because it makes students of color

feel a more welcoming atmosphere. The OMA values inclusive excellence by demonstrating a home away from home atmosphere like the multicultural center for students to interact with each other, make friends, study, and most importantly, getting involved both on-campus and off-campus.

To fulfill the mission of the OMA, the office must make sure that they are there for their students and are ready to direct them in the right direction, especially retaining them and having them graduate.

Ethical Issues and Values

This research was submitted to the University of Wisconsin-Superior's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and carefully reviewed by the committee before it was conducted to ensure rights and safety of the human subjects. The researcher used the secondary data collection tool and to protect identity of the human subjects, the excel spreadsheet that was provided did not include names or ethnicities of them. Once the research was finished, data collection materials were shredded and recycled.

According to the National Association of Social Work (2013), peer mentoring program is related to the value of importance in human relationships. This research demonstrates the importance of human relationships, the peer mentoring program seemed to have promoted healthy relationship to students, maintained success to make students obtain their self-assurance, and enhanced their achievement goals to make them more hopeful of their education career path.

Social Justice

This research will have an effect on social justice because student of color will either remain enrolled at the University of Wisconsin – Superior the following semester or transfer to another college. The university will be able to retain the student if the student feels that the peer mentoring program helped them succeed. The university will lose the student if the student feels unwelcomed and academically unsuccessful in peer mentoring program. Another social justice effect is ensuring educational equity. The university must make a commitment to their students that they will do their best to help their students be successful.

Results

Table 1.1 and 1.2 showed results that was received from the IRD for the Peer Program Retention Study. The table shows two different cohorts as well as students. The first table were the results in cohort one for Fall 2011 and the second table were the results in cohort two for Fall 2012.

Presentation of findings.

Cohort One

Table 1.1 shows the results of cohort one which was the participants and non-participants in the program for the year Fall 2011.

Cohort 1	# Students Entering Fall 2011	# Students Retained Spring 2012	% Retained to Spring 2012	# Students Retained Fall 2012	% Retained to Fall 2012	# Students Retained Spring 2013	% Retained to Spring 2013
Fall 2012 PEER Participants	7	7	100%	7	100%	6	86%
Fall 2012 Non-PEER Participants	67	47	70%	41	61%	31	46%

Cohort Two

Table 1.2 shows the results of cohort two which was the participants and non-participants in the program for the year Fall 2012.

Cohort 2	# Students Entering Fall 2011	# Students Retained Spring 2012	% Retained to Spring 2012	# Students Retained Fall 2012	% Retained to Fall 2012	# Students Retained Spring 2013	% Retained to Spring 2013
Fall 2012 PEER Participants				7	7	100%	
Fall 2012 Non-PEER Participants				73	50	68%	

Interpretation of findings

In cohort one (table 1.1), there were seven peer program participants in Fall 2011. Of the seven participants, all of them (100%) were retained in Spring 2012. The seven participants also returned in Fall 2012, but dropped to a percentage of 86 in Spring 2013, because one participant did not return. As for the second line in the same table, there were 67 non-peer program participants in Fall 2011. Of the 67 participants, 47 of them were retained in Spring 2012. In Fall 2012, there were 41 out of 47 came back (61%) that were retained. In Spring 2013, there were 31 out of 41 came back (46%) that were retained. The students who participated in the program during Fall 2011 were retained at 100% for one year then dropped to 86% by Spring 2013 compared to the non-participants that were retained at 70% then dropped to 46% by Spring 2013.

In cohort two (table 1.2), there were seven peer program participants in Fall 2012. Of the seven participants, all of them (100%) were retained in Spring 2013. As for the second cohort, there were 73 non-peer program participants in Fall 2012. Of the 73 participants, 50 of them (68%) were retained in Spring 2013. The students who participated in the program during Fall 2012 were retained at 100% through Spring 2013 versus the non-participants who were

retained at 68%. Therefore, this program was successful at both retaining and helping students succeed.

Conclusion

Summary of peer mentorship program

Overall, the results demonstrates that the peer mentoring program was successful in retaining their students. During the years Fall 2011 and Fall 2012, there was a 100 percentage total for the participants in the program. Although one was not retained in Spring 2013, a percentage of 86 is above average on a 100 percentage scale in retaining students. The retention rates were different for the two cohorts, because one cohort used the peer mentoring program as a benefit to succeed while the other cohort did not use a program as a tool to be successful. The peer mentoring program seems to have impact on the cohort that took advantage of their help because they were retained and remained enrolled at the university for the next semester.

Limitations

One limitation is that characteristics between the peer and non-peer participants. The peer participants were selected and voluntarily chose to be part of the program. The non-peer participants was given an option to be a participant, but for many reasons could not be a participant in the studying academic school years of 2011 and 2012. A second limitation is that the peer program group was smaller than the non-peer program group. The peer program group was smaller because the program was grant funded and had a limitation of 10 students who could participate per year. The non-peer program group was larger because of the limited space the peer program was given. A third limitation is that since the peer program only had

seven participants, it was easier for them to keep track and retain those students. As for the non-peer participants, it was harder to retain them because losing track of them is easier. Generally speaking, keeping a smaller group of people is easier than a larger group. Overall, the peer mentoring program was not the main reason why the students were retained, but according to the research, it appears that the peer mentoring program was one of the reasons that helped retained the students at the university. Also, the data shows that the participants of the program had a higher retention rate than those who did not participate in the program.

Recommendations for future researchers.

One recommendation for future researchers is to consider conducting a survey for current participants of the peer mentoring program to show more thorough research. I believe the research will be more thorough, because the interviews will support the success of the program and give others a more clear view of how the program really helped them succeed. I think this will also make the research stronger being that there were small numbers of participants in both years. Another recommendation is to consider doing an interview with one peer participant and one non peer participant to learn how the program helped them succeed. I believe this will serve as an important part of the research, because you are engaging with the program in a way that will impact participants of the program in the future. The last recommendation is to consider looking at other factors that contribute to low retention and to see if there was a pattern that was developed to cause retention. I believe this will be valuable information for the research, because it will help universities brainstorm strategic plans to increase their numbers in retaining their students.

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