

Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program for University Students with Disabilities: Self-Report Measures and Academic Outcomes for Program Participants

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Abstract : As individuals with disabilities attend higher education in greater numbers, universities are seeking ways to support the retention and success of these students, beyond the academically based accommodations. Although mentoring programs for this population are being implemented more frequently, there is a lack of empirically validated outcomes which could promote program replication. The research objective of this exploratory study was to examine outcomes for students with disabilities participating in a peer-to-peer mentoring program. Mentees (students with disabilities) met with their mentor (trained upperclassman) once a week for an hour for one semester (14-weeks). Mentors followed a curriculum structured by monthly and weekly goals to guide the sessions. Curriculum topics included socializing on campus, peer pressure, time management, communicating with peers and professors, classroom etiquette, study skills, and seeking help and campus resources. Data was collected over a period of seven semesters resulting in seven separate cohorts (n=46). The impact of the program was measured using quantitative self-report measures as well as qualitative content analysis of focus groups. Academic outcomes (retention, credits earned, and GPA) were compared between those in the mentoring program and a matched group of students registered with Disability Services who did not receive mentoring. In addition, a one-year follow up was conducted to examine the longer term impact of participation. Findings indicated that mentoring had the most impact in knowing how things work at the university, knowing how and where to find opportunities to meet people on campus, and knowing how to access supports. Mentors also provided a supportive relationship to the mentees and helped with social skills. There were no significant differences in academic outcomes between those who were mentored and those in the comparison group. Most mentees reported continuing to benefit from the program one year on, providing support for the retention of knowledge gained and maintenance of positive outcomes over time. In conclusion, while a range of positive outcomes were evidenced, the model was limited in its impact more broadly, particularly with regards to academic success and impacting more complex challenges.

Keywords : mentor, outcomes, students with disabilities, university

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