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How Peer Mentors Support the Transition of First-Year College Students

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HOW PEER MENTORS SUPPORT THE TRANSITION OF FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE

STUDENTS

by

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This qualitative, multiple case study examined how peer mentors at a public, four-year university supported the transition of first-year college students. Using Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework the study was guided by the following questions: 1) How did peer mentors, in light of the Approaching Transitions phase in Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) theory, help first-time students understand their college transition? 2) In what ways did peer mentors directly provide support to first-time students to help first-time students as they transition to college? 3) With what other support resources, whether on or off campus, did peer mentors connect first-time freshmen to help them as they transition to college? 4) How did peer mentors help first-time students develop strategies to cope with the transition to college? The participants included four peer mentors and seven first-year students at a midsized public university in the Southwest part of the United States. Data for the study included documents and artifacts from the mentoring program, observations of first-year students meeting with their mentors, and individual interviews with the first-year students and mentors.

The data suggested, in line with Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework, that the peer mentors first helped students process or understand the novel

college experience and then supported the first-year students while those students endeavored to develop new systems of support. In this, they both directly served as a short-term safety net for the first-year students while simultaneously helping the students develop longer-term support systems that allowed first-year students to better transition to college life. This study offers suggestions for research and implications for practice based on these findings.

Dedication

To my wife, Emily. Your patience and encouragement have been invaluable. Though in a different field and a bit farther down the road than I had originally thought, it is now the Drs. Prevost as we had discussed years ago. It is finally done and since it is doubtless far from perfect, perhaps I can only say "Quod scripsi, scripsi." And to Wilhelmina, John, Bill, Jim, Brenda, Paul, Ruth Anne, David, and Joyce all of whom at various times and in different ways mentored me.

But I'm afraid I'm bad at comforting; I can listen all right, but I can hardly ever find anything to say.

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*

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…To the staff at Southwest Regional State University. Your dedication to providing services and support for your students has led to the creation of something impressive. The openness with which you received this project and the access you provided were invaluable. I sincerely hope you are able to sustain the peer mentoring program you have put in place.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Appendixes

Chapter 1: Introduction

There is a significant difference between merely knowing that something works as compared to a deeper understanding of how or why it works. While the former is useful, the latter is considerably more valuable as such an understanding allows you to further refine and improve the process. The role peer mentors play in helping first-year undergraduate students transition to college is one realm where this disparity in understanding exists. While colleges and universities have widely implemented mentoring programs on campus (Gershenfeld, 2014) and the extant literature has accepted its value to students (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), our understanding remains underdeveloped in key areas. Gershenfeld (2014) concisely noted this discrepancy when she stated, "Research on mentoring has not kept pace with the proliferation of undergraduate programs" (p. 365). Stated another way, despite not knowing as much as we ought about mentoring, tertiary educational institutions continue to increase its use.

Such research as has been done on mentoring in higher education does consistently demonstrate links to a host of positive educational and personal outcomes for students such as persistence, higher GPAs, vocational discernment, developing a sense of community, as well as lower rates of depression and anxiety (Campbell et al., 2012; Girves et al., 2005; Hurd et al., 2016; Salas et al., 2014). With an increasing focus on improving student outcomes in recent years, it is therefore understandable that campuses have increasingly implemented mentoring as a way to support students. Among the many different benefits, one area mentoring can be effective for college students is by aiding the transition of first-year traditional undergraduate students into post-secondary education (Cornelius et al., 2016; Goff, 2011; Hu & Ma, 2010; Hurd et al., 2016). Given

the importance of the transition into college life, integrating new students is often the central aim of mentoring programs for first-year students (Seery et al., 2021).

The transition to college is a vital yet fraught milestone in the life of many young adults presenting new opportunities for personal growth and increased autonomy. It is a time when students can begin to "learn to manage their finances, course choices, friendships, and relationships with family and faculty in a more complex environment than was typically demanded of them in high school" (Carter et al., 2013, p.93). With this potential for personnel development, however, come a host of challenges. Students often do not anticipate the extent to which college differs academically, socially, and emotionally as compared to high school (Bolle et al., 2007; Tinto, 2012). They may consider neither the range nor the complexity of changes that they are likely to encounter (Carter et al., 2013).

Critically, failure to navigate these difficulties can negatively affect first-year students in a variety of ways starting at the most basic level, persistence in their college education. In fact, more than one in three of the students who start college will fail to complete a degree, the majority leaving in the course of or at the end of their first year (Kerr et al., 2004; Mattanah et al., 2010). The failure of these students to complete their college education can have profound consequences for the students, colleges and universities, and society as a whole (Hauptman, 2007; Tinto, 2012; Yomtov et al., 2017). For the students, failing to complete a college degree leads to dramatically lower lifetime earning potential (Tinto, 2012). For institutions, there are increased costs associated with recruiting and onboarding new students to replace those who leave (Blum & Jarrat, 2013). For society there are a variety of economic and social costs such as lost tax

revenue, higher rates of incarceration, and lower voter participation (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Price & Tovar, 2013).

Even among those who do continue in college, struggles with the transition process can present a range of complications. First, new students are likely to find the rigor and even structure of classes to be very different from that to which they were accustomed in high school (Barnett et al., 2016; Ingram & Gallacher, 2013). In college, students are likely to spend less time in the classroom and are expected to study more on their own. This is a considerable change in routine for them. How well students do in classes in their first year is also highly predictive of future grades (Rokaa & Whitley, 2017). The aforementioned autonomy combined with this more open schedule can also come with greater access to temptations such as alcohol, drugs, and sex that students must navigate while they also learn to manage their time to a greater degree than was required in high school (Mattanah et al., 2010; Wernersbach et al., 2014).

Students starting in higher education may also feel alone as they work to develop new social networks to replace those they might be leaving behind (Leary & DeRosier, 2012). First-year students often move away as they begin college resulting in changes to their relationships with family as well as existing friendships. Even if a student does not move, some of their friends may depart as those friends start college or a career. Most, if not all, permutations of this reflect some change in the network of relationships that students had developed as part of their personal support network, a key factor in how first-year students will respond to transition (Anderson et al., 2021).

These stresses also contribute to a range of mental health problems including rising rates of suicide (Johnson et al., 2010; Kneeland & Dovidio, 2020). Given these

realities, it is imperative to develop a better understanding of what can be done to improve the transition of first-year students. This study aims to address this deficiency by providing insight into how one type of intervention, peer mentoring, aids the transition of first-year students.

Context for the Study

I conducted this study at Southwest Regional State University (SRSU), a pseudonym for a four-year, public institution that enrolls approximately 14,000 students. SRSU has a formal, institutionally sponsored mentoring program that pairs peer mentors with multiple new, first-year students. The program employed between 20 and 25 paid peer mentors, all of whom had completed at least one year of college. The program trained the mentors and established the parameters within which they were expected to support the first-year students. The mentors were supposed to provide information and academic support while helping the students connect socially. To that end, each incoming student was assigned to a peer mentor with whom they could meet. While the first-year students were encouraged to work with their mentor, this was not required of them.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand how peer mentors contributed to new, first-time first-year students transitioning into higher education.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Schlossberg's Transition Framework, also commonly referred to as her transition theory or transition model (Anderson et al., 2021). While originally dating to the 1980s, Schlossberg's transition framework has undergone at least 4 revisions since its inception and the manuscript in

which it is currently found is coauthored by Anderson and Goodman. The framework was
initially developed to explain the transition of people entering retirement but has since
been applied to a variety of adult life changes across varied populations and
circumstances. This wide applicability along with the transition framework's ability to
account for simultaneous transitions and their interactions with one another contributed to
my choice to use it for this study.

Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework was designed to
cover the whole timeframe of the transition process and is divided into three stages
Approaching Transitions, Taking Stock of Coping Resources, and Taking Charge
(Anderson et al., 2021). For reasons I will discuss in chapter two, I only utilized the first
two parts of the framework for this study. Part one, Approaching Transitions, considered
the type of change the individual is undergoing. This differentiated between happenings
that were expected as compared to ones that were not foreseen. It also recognized that
some events that are anticipated do not actually end up occurring. This first stage also
acknowledged that similarly named changes will be experienced differently by various
people. Furthermore, this first stage accounted for the ways in which personal disparities
such as history, family situation, stage of life, etc. affect any given transition and how
individuals understand it. Finally, stage one considered the degree to which the transition
in question actually changes the day-to-day life of the person.

The second stage of the transition framework was taking stock of coping
resources. This is often referred to as the 4s system because it was comprised of situation,
self, support, and strategies. This combination of factors, which though often helpful in
transition can sometimes have deleterious effects, determines how an individual reacts to

and manages the transition(s) that they are experiencing. Importantly this is not a static process as new forms of support can be added as well as unrecognized forms identified.

Research Questions

The research question along with sub-questions are as follows:

Research Question: How did peer mentors contribute to the college transition of first-time, traditional, undergraduate students?

- How did peer mentors, in light of the Approaching Transition phase in Schlossberg's (2021) theory, help first-time students understand their college transition?

- In what ways did peer mentors directly provide support to first-time students to help first-time students as they transition to college?

- With what other support resources, whether on or off campus, did peer mentors connect first-time freshmen to help them as they transition to college?

- How did peer mentors help first-time students develop strategies to cope with the transition to college?

Definition of terms

- Transition – For this study, I followed Anderson et al. (2021) who defined transition as something that "results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 26).

- Traditional undergraduate student – "Traditional students are defined as those aged 21 and younger, who are most likely to have followed an unbroken linear path through the education system" (Bye et al., 2007, p.141). Put another way this

means students who enter collect immediately following graduation from high school.

- Mentoring – "Traditionally, *mentoring* has been defined as a relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé" (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p.5, italics in the original). It should be noted that I used the term mentee instead of protégé in this study.

- Peer mentoring is where "qualified students provide guidance and support to vulnerable students to enable them to navigate through their education (Terrion & Leonard, 2007, p. 149). "Unlike traditional mentoring, peer mentoring matches mentors and mentees who are roughly equal in age, experience, and power to provide task and psychosocial support" (Terrion & Leonard, 2007, p. 150).

- Intervention – Information, relationships programs, or services used with students "to facilitate particular aspects of development" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 308).

Overview of Methods

This study to understand how mentors assisted first-year students with their transitions to college was a qualitative multiple case study. For this study I used multiple forms of data including interviews, observations, documents, artifacts, and questionnaires. The use of varied forms of data is common when conducting a case study (Stake, 1995). These various forms of data were intended to provide a more complete understanding of the cases chosen for inclusion in the study. To protect the identity of the participants I have chosen to use pseudonyms not only for the mentors and their

associated mentees but also for many locations including, as previously noted, referring to the institution by the designation Southwest Regional State University (SRSU).

Case selection

The cases for this study were what I have termed peer mentoring clusters at SRSU. I have chosen to define a peer mentoring cluster as one mentor and one or more of their associated peer mentees. It is important to note that the mentors in this study had a relationship with the individual mentees, but the mentees do not necessarily have any relationship with or even necessarily know each other. I decided to coin this terminology because there is a lack of appropriate vocabulary in the mentoring sphere to describe the arrangement I encountered at SRSU since the pair or dyad is the traditional mentoring structure (Crisp & Curz, 2009; Darwin & Palmer, 2009). There were between 20 and 25 peer mentors working with first-year students at the institution around the time I conducted this study. I chose my cases from among these. To make that selection I utilized mixed sampling including criterion, intensity, and purposeful sampling (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). This process included results from questionnaires that I distributed to both the mentors and their associated mentees in the program. The goal was to identify cases where mentors aided the transition of first-year students who had undergone considerable levels of change as they started college. I determined that these would constitute data-rich cases and expected them to yield more information relevant to the research question and sub-questions of this study. The mentor and one or more of their associated mentees also had to be willing to be interviewed in order to be included as a case. Within this structure, I also sought to achieve diversity among both the mentors

and their mentees. I intended to select a minimum of three cases for inclusion in the study and ended up including four cases.

Data selection and collection

I began the data collection with documents and artifacts from the program, a common approach in case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, these documents and artifacts included training materials provided to the peer mentors to help me understand the ways in which they are taught to work with students in transition as well as the expectations the mentors were expected to fulfill. In addition, I collected or accessed websites, emails, social media posts, advertisements, etc. that communicated the purpose and content of the mentoring program to first-year students (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The next form of data I collected was observations of the mentors during their training (Bhattacharya, 2017). This took place before the start of the fall semester. I expected this to supplement my understanding of the written materials, by allowing me to view the mentors in a more natural context and allowing me to meet and begin developing rapport with potential participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, Yin, 2018). I took field notes to record my observations for later analysis. I also collected handouts and took digital pictures of presentations in the room.

I continued data selection and gathering by sending questionnaires to all the mentors and first-year students in the mentoring program (Yin 2018). In the case of the mentors, this was to gauge the degree to which they believe they have been able to aid the transition of their assigned first-year students. For the mentees, these questionnaires were to collect information about their experiences associated with transitioning to college and the degree to which they believe their assigned mentor has assisted them with the

transition process. For both groups, the questionnaires collected demographic data and ascertained whether or not they were willing to be considered for selection in the interview portion of the study.

Interviews with mentors and mentees were a core data source for this study (Saldaña, 2011). I had planned to interview at least three mentors along with a minimum of two mentees associated with each case. I ended up actually including four mentoring clusters in the study. As part of that I intended to conduct two interviews with each person utilizing broad, open-ended, topical questions (Seidman, 2019; Stake 1995). One of the first-year students only completed one of the two intended interviews. All other participants completed both interviews. The order for the interviews employed a chiastic structure with the mentors interviewed first and last. The two interviews with the mentees were sandwiched in between. Each interview was scheduled for one hour. I transcribed all interviews verbatim after they were completed.

In addition, I had planned to include two more sets of observations in the data collection process (Bhattacharya, 2017). I thought this would allow me to observe interactions between the mentoring pairs and further develop rapport with participants. The first form of observation I included was observations of individual mentoring sessions. In these sessions, mentees met with their mentors during a scheduled 20-minute timeframe, though several of the meetings I overserved went over that scheduled time allotment. I recorded and transcribed these meetings. I had also planned to include a second set of observations consisting of social events planned by the mentors for the mentees and organized through the mentoring program. However, due to logistical issues I will discuss later I was not able to include this second type of observation in the study.

Data analysis

As I collected the various forms of data, I entered them into a secure database. I used the Atlas Ti software to manage and organize my data as well as facilitate coding, though I still made all coding and analytical decisions. I utilized a concurrent analysis approach where I began to code data as it was collected rather than waiting until after all data collection had been completed (Miles et al., 2014). These initial rounds of analysis focused on coding the data to identify important ideas that I discerned as I read through the different forms of data. At that stage, I used simultaneous, open coding where I did not have a preset codes list and pieces of information could be and in many cases were assigned to more than one category.

In the second round of coding began to aggregate the data into categories looking for patterns that emerge. This was the point where I started focusing on how themes that I noted in the data correlated with specific aspects of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework. I looked for how the data combined to form assertions or propositions related to the research question and sub questions. Additionally, I considered whether the data pointed to alternate explanations. Since this was a multiple case study I also compared and contrasted the cases to look for commonalities as well as differences in the approaches of the different mentors. This was only done once I had completed all the interviews so as not to impose potential preconceptions from one case onto the others. Once all data analysis was complete, I began shaping the results into the final study report.

Delimitations

As with any study, I as a researcher had to make decisions about delimitations in order to define the scope and structure of this study which made actually conducting the research practicable. Such decisions inevitably might have limited its transferability, though with these delimitations in mind, I attempted to construct the study in a way that makes the results as applicable as possible to other situations. The first delimitation was that I chose to look at peer mentoring only at one institution. Mentoring programs vary greatly and including cases at different sites would hypothetically have provided a broader picture of mentoring. Second, the peer mentors at this institution were paid which likely influenced who served as a peer mentor. For budgetary reasons, this option may not be available at other colleges and universities.

In addition, I opted to limit the number of cases, even though including more would likely have been possible even given the constraints of the case selection criteria, though this is not certain. I actually conducted a first interview with a fifth mentor but none of her associated mentees followed through on scheduled interviews, so I did not proceed with data collection in that case, nor did I include any information gleaned in that single interview in this study. Similarly, I could probably have found more mentees associated with some of the cases. I chose, however, to try and delve more deeply with each case rather than electing to conduct fewer or shorter interviews with more individuals. Finally, I chose to examine the transition experience of traditional first-time undergraduate students. In today's college environment, while these students still represent the majority of students starting college, the number of students who do not fit

within this category continues to grow and may even represent a majority at some

institutions (Hittepole, 2019; National, 2021).

Limitations

There were also limitations associated with this study. For example, relying

heavily on interview data, as this study did, introduced several limitations. The data and

subsequent analysis were extremely dependent on the self-disclosure of the participants.

The amount and types of information they shared might have been limited unintentionally

based on what they remembered at the time of the interviews or the ways in which they

understood the questions in the interview protocol. Alternatively, they could have chosen

not to share information if they deemed it overly personal or if they did not feel

comfortable. It is for these reasons that, in addition to data collection, I attended the

mentor training and events as a way to begin developing rapport and trust.

These motivations for students intentionally not sharing information were also

applicable to the observation of mentoring meetings. Regarding those observations, there

was also a concern that even if both mentor and mentees were comfortable and trusted

me, my mere presence almost certainly changed the interactions between them. I did not

expect my presence at the mentor training to have a sizable effect since the larger group

setting should have rendered me less noticeable. Some influence, however, was still

possible.

Next, as an outsider at the institution, I was dependent on gatekeepers to provide

access for data collection. While indications were that the institution and personnel with

whom I planned to work were extremely excited about the study and were very willing to

share, I was limited in what I knew to look and ask for. There may have been additional

ways in which I could have gained an understanding of the role the mentors play in the

college transitions of their first-year mentees, but my lack of familiarity might have

manifested in me not knowing to request access.

Finally, I was dependent on participants choosing to join the study. While I

developed criteria to help identify information-rich cases, I was limited to interviewing

mentors and mentees who were willing to take part. While based on discussions with the

program director I anticipated that mentors would be readily willing to participate, the

mentees were an unknown as they had not yet arrived at the institution. In the course of

the study, I found projections about participation rates for first-year students and even to

a certain degree peer mentor participation were overly optimistic.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study, including the problem it sought to address,

defined important terms essential to writing about it, and provided an overview of the

study I conducted about peer mentoring. The chapter explained the need for

understanding how peer mentors help first-year students transition to college and the way

this study addressed that gap in the literature. This is important because while many

institutions use peer mentoring to support new students, we do not have even a basic

understanding of how they are successful in doing so.

In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature on first-year student transitions to

college, peer mentoring, and Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework

which I used as the theoretical framework for this study. In this, I examine what we know

about peer mentoring and the deficiencies in our knowledge. In Chapter 3 I explain the

methodology for this study including my decision to use a case study approach followed

by my data collection analysis. Next, Chapter 4 reports the findings of this study and the themes I discerned. Finally, in Chapter 5 I conclude by discussing the relationship between my findings and the extant literature as well and the contributions and implications of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I present an overview of the themes and theories found in the extant literature central to this study. First, I will examine the topic of college transition including its importance, the difficulties it can entail, as well as attempts to mitigate or remedy said difficulties. I will then provide a detailed description of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Theory, which served as the theoretical framework for this study, and the ways in which the transition framework has been utilized to study college transitions. Next, I will review the literature on mentoring starting broadly before focusing specifically on peer mentoring within the larger mentoring context. Finally, I will survey the intersection of peer mentoring and the college transition process for first-year college students.

First-Year Students' Transition to College

Entering college is a significant milestone in the lives of many young adults that typically ushers in myriad changes across various domains of their lives. For many traditional first-year students this rite of passage serves as a marker of their transition into adulthood. Consequently, starting college is frequently viewed as an exciting undertaking encompassing possibilities of personal growth, new experiences, and newfound independence (Kurland & Siegel, 2013; Harper et al., 2019; Mattanah et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2016). As Carter and her collaborators (2013) noted, students have the opportunity to "learn to manage their finances, course choices, friendships, and relationships with family and faculty in a more complex environment than was typically demanded of them in high school" (p.93). Yet, this opportunity is also accompanied by numerous challenges. Despite the profound repercussions it will have on their lives, most students commence

the transition to college without a sufficient understanding of what to expect academically, socially, and emotionally (Bolle et al., 2007; Tinto, 2012). Many do not anticipate the degree to which "college presents a foreign set of norms, traditions, and rituals, and a new language and environment" (Hunter, 2006, p.4). The initial excitement of starting college can soon wane as first-year students may realize that they failed to appreciate the levels of transition this new endeavor will require, the difficulties multiple life changes might entail, or the new skills they must develop in order to be successful in this new milieu. (Gibney et al., 2011).

The Importance of the College Transition

The stakes involved in first-year students successfully transitioning to college are considerable for all parties involved. Among the interested parties are the students themselves, their families, the institutions they attend, and even society as a whole. First of all, for students and their families, a successful transition has both short-term and long-term implications. In the near term, an effective transition leads to persistence and improved academic performance (Kerr et al., 2004; Tinto, 2012). Despite national gains in both college enrolment and completion metrics, between 33 and 40 percent of students who start college will never complete a degree (Kerr et al., 2004; Mattanah et al., 2010). For the students and their families, this would likely entail several economic realities. Beyond the resources invested, fiscal and otherwise, that do not yield a completed degree as well as probable pending loan repayments, there are additional long-term financial repercussions (Carlson & Laderman, 2016; Lkhamsuren et al., 2009). As Tinto (2012) discussed, while completing at least some college yields on average an additional $250,000 in lifetime income compared to someone with only a high school diploma, the

increased lifetime earnings of a college graduate are four times that amount. Even with

the rising costs for higher education, these averages illustrate the likely financial benefits

that accrue when a student completes at least a bachelor's degree.

There are also societal interests in college degree completion (Yomtov et al.,

2017). In addition to lower tax revenue derived from the lower lifetime earnings just

discussed, college attrition also results in underutilized human capital (Engle & Tinto,

2008; Hauptman, 2007). This will likely lead to trouble filling jobs in important sectors

of the economy as the number of college graduates fails to keep pace with the creation of

positions requiring a bachelor's degree or higher (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Price & Tovar,

2014). Furthermore, college completion is associated with other varied societal benefits

such as "voting, health, unemployment, poverty, rates of incarceration, and school

readiness of children" (Tinto, 2012, p. 2). Due to these benefits, as well as mounting

concern about the amount of money spent on higher education, there is a growing trend at

all levels of government to tie various forms of institutional funding to improved

graduation rates (DesJardins et al., 2002; Dougherty et al., 2010; Hauptman, 2007).

Money spent on students who do not graduate is increasingly seen as a poor investment

of tax dollars (Dougherty et al., 2010).

Finally, a successful transition as a step toward eventual college completion has

meaningful consequences for institutions as well. The just-discussed trend toward tying

government funding to higher educational outcomes, rather than merely enrollment

numbers, alone produces a strong financial inducement (Blum & Jarrat, 2013; Dougherty

et al., 2010). Beyond this financial consideration, colleges and universities also face

increased expenses in recruiting students to replace those who failed to successfully

transition to college and move on to degree completion. As Blum and Jarrat (2013) succinctly stated, "the cost to engage, recruit, and orient new students often makes them substantially more expensive to serve than returning students" (p. 69). So, despite the challenges associated with new students transitioning into tertiary education, there are concrete benefits for multiple stakeholders to increase the likelihood of successful college transitions among first-year students.

Attempts to Improve College Transitions

Given such ramifications, as well as the potential rewards for the interested different parties, it is little wonder that more attention and resources have been dedicated to improving transitions for first-year students as they start college. More than ten years ago Nelson and colleagues (2012) observed "an almost exponential growth during the last decade in the perceived importance and centrality of the first-year experience (FYE) for tertiary success" with a "corresponding interest on easing the transition" (p. 185) of first-year students into their college experience. Fortunately, the literature demonstrates that various interventions and programs exist which can improve the transition process for students (Dornan, 2015; Kerr et al., 2004).

A great deal has been written on different approaches which have successfully aided first-year students as they transition to higher education to the point that it far exceeds the scope of this chapter to try to address all of them. There are among the numerous approaches, however, a few examples which are relevant enough to this study to warrant consideration as I believe they may relate to the way in which peer mentors aid the transition of first-year students to college life. Among these are first-year programs, orientation programs, social supports, academic supports, and student engagement on

campus (Gibney et al., 2011; Price & Tovar, 2014; Rodriquez et al., 2017). It should also

be noted that peer mentoring is often included among the interventions utilized with first-

year students (Nelson et al., 2012; Wharton et al., 2017; Yomtov et al., 2017). These

types of interventions are used, often in combination, to mitigate the difficulties first-year

students encounter when they start college. I will now discuss some of those specific

difficulties and the ways in which institutions seek to address them.

Research Identifying First-Year Transition Challenges

In examining the research on first-year college student transitions several things

quickly become evident. To begin with, first-year students face a wide range of

challenges including academic, social, financial, and emotional, just to name a few

(Clark, 2005; Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007). Moreover, while all students face challenges,

those challenges are not equally distributed amongst all students nor are the resources to

help facilitate better transitions. Differences such as race, socioeconomic status, and

gender can all influence how students experience, cope with, and receive support for their

experience of starting college (Clark, 2005; Carter et al., 2013; Pino et al., 2012). Despite

these differences, research on college transitions has traditionally focused on the

experience of white students, though more recent studies have begun to remedy this

deficiency (Carter, 2005; Louie, 2007). Finally, a range of academic and professional

disciplines have endeavored to understand college transition. Sociologists, psychologists,

anthropologists, and higher education researchers have all undertaken studies in this area.

However, as Louie (2007) noted, the work from these diverse and distinctive fields is

often poorly integrated and frequently inadequately connected to policy. These realities

slow the redress of the challenges first-year students face and perhaps even add to them.

This section considers some difficulties associated with starting college, the ways in which these can vary among different student populations, and some means to assist first-year students as they begin their higher educational journey.

Mental Health. Young adulthood in general is a time when individuals experience higher levels of mental health problems which are often exacerbated by the transition to college (Kneeland & Dovidio, 2020). These problems have, by some measures, been increasing in recent years with rising rates of suicide and mental health treatment (Johnson et al., 2010). While elevated levels of stress are associated with the college experience in general, for the majority of students those stressors peak during their initial transition to college (Leary & DeRosier, 2012). During that timeframe students often have to develop a new social network while "keeping up with schoolwork in an environment of much greater autonomy than high school, and negotiating the 'temptations' of a college environment (e.g., alcohol, drugs, and sex)" (Mattanah et al., 2010, p. 93). This observation is critical because it not only highlights some of the psychological stressors that students face but also suggests the ways in which such stressors are interconnected and can amplify one another.

Social Connection. One of the essential tasks for students at they begin college is "developing social connections and avoiding social isolation" (Leary & DeRosier, 2012, p. 1216). Many students starting college will leave behind familiar social networks that they have known and upon which they relied in adolescence. Importantly these social connections, or the lack thereof, not only can become a source of stress, but also function to buffer stress in other realms of life when present and healthy (Leary & DeRosier, 2012). This social disruption then is potentially doubly problematic as it can both

introduce new forms of stress while also potentially severing ties that served as a means by which the young adults coped with stress. The new networks first-year students strive to develop influence how the students view themselves and the degree to which they may participate in the larger social structures of the college or university (Biancani & McFarland, 2013; Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007). Simultaneously students are going through a related process of identity development wherein they strengthen their own conception of who they are as an individual (Patton et al., 2016; Tatum, 2000). While this has also been a precarious undertaking, Yang et al. (2018) concluded that the current social media environment further complicates these processes for students today.

Academics. First-year college students also must acclimatize academically as they transition to higher education. Successful academic transition is essential as "first-year GPA is highly predictive of subsequent GPA and persistence" (Rokaa & Whitley, 2017, p. 334). First and foremost, colleges and universities must help first-year students adapt to the more rigorous academic expectations of college as compared to the secondary education the students have just completed (Barnett et al., 2016; Zhang, 2021). Institutions often require students they perceive as inadequately prepared to complete remedial work which is associated with a lower likelihood of passing courses and decreased student persistence (Barnett et al., 2016). In addition to more demanding classwork, college education also takes place in a different type of environment where students are more responsible for their own learning (Ingram & Gallacher, 2013; O'Rawe, 2014). Zhang (2021) indicated that students generally spend less time receiving direct class instruction and more time studying outside the classroom. With this change comes a shift toward self-regulated learning as students must learn to study more

independently (Ingram & Gallacher, 2013). Colleges and universities have recognized that this represents such a dramatic shift in the mode of education that as Winne (2013) observed the vast majority, if not all, offer methods of support to instruct students how to better study and learn. Taken together these mean that the college transition typically ushers in changes to the social and educational norms to which students have been accustomed at a time when they are also refining their own self-understanding. It is not surprising that college transition is such an important, transformative, and turbulent adjustment for first-year students.

  Differences Among Sub-populations. For many students, however, that is not the complete picture. As noted at the start of this section, while college transition can be difficult for all students, it presents more numerous and greater hardships for some. Race is one factor that further complicates starting college. Carter et al. (2013) focused on the racial disparities that students of color encounter as they transition to college. In their study, they observed that students of color often face particular financial and academic challenges, along with a negative racial climate. Financially, for example, the authors noted that African American students had to take out loans to pay for college at substantially higher rates than the average student as well as work more hours on average while attending college. The former increases the financial risks, and associated stress, should a student not graduate. The latter is associated with lower academic success and persistence (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

  A negative racial climate on campus can further pressure students of color as they navigate the tension between potentially feeling pressure to relinquish parts of their identity and fitting into the college culture which often inculcates majority values and

forms of identity (Carter et al., 2013). This type of negative racial climate can make higher educational environments socially unwelcoming to students of color (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007). As with social connection and identity development above, social media has expanded the ways in which students of color can encounter racism. Not only might students face racist abuse in person, but now racism is spread through a variety of online platforms that are often integral to making social connections in college (Gin et al., 2017). As previously noted, the difficulty in developing attachments in college increases stress and leads to poor student outcomes. Building such attachments is rendered considerably harder when students perceive that they are not welcome in that environment. Kurland and Siegel's (2013) admonition about students needing assistance, as discussed in their study about professional academic advisors, would seem to be particularly significantly poignant for students of color. Kroshus et al. (2021) also emphasized the need to create supports for minoritized students that "limit chronic stressors while encouraging… connection in the broader campus community" (p.9).

Pino et al. (2012) discussed some of the same issues specifically among Latinx students. Their research, in line with Carter and colleagues (2013), noted that minority students often attended high schools that lacked the rigorous academic preparation needed for college. This can increase the need for remedial classes which necessitate longer enrollment and additional associated costs.

Additionally, students of color, especially Latinx students, are more likely to be first-generation college students, where no relatives have college experience to impart in order to help prepare them (Pino et al., 2012). This poses a challenge as colleges and universities can often function in ways that presuppose knowledge of how their systems

operate. These structures tend to disadvantage first-generation students academically, not just in their first year, but also during the whole course of their enrollment and beyond (Wang, 2014). Stephens et al. (2014) noted that this is also frequently accompanied by feelings of uncertainty among first-year students regarding whether they belong at college in the first place. Furthermore, once these difficulties begin, these students "lack insight about why they are struggling and do not understand how students 'like them can improve'" (Stephens et al., 2014, p. 2). While such realities are true for all new students who are first-generation, they amplify the concerns just discussed for students of color who are disproportionately more likely to be first-generation to begin with.

Interventions to Improve College Transitions

Given these and other challenges that first-year students face, as well as a growing emphasis on student persistence, many institutions have begun implementing assorted interventions to smooth the college transition. Among the range of intercessions colleges and universities have utilized are summer and start-of-year orientation programs, first-year seminars, student or faculty/staff led support groups, tutors, supplemental instruction, service learning, and mentoring programs (Apriceno et al., 2020; Hunter, 2006; Ingram & Gallacher, 2013; Leary & DeRosier, 2012). Often grouped together under the umbrella of first-year experience initiatives, research has shown that these programs can aid the college transition (Hunter, 2006). Crucially for this study, studies have demonstrated that mentoring is one of the effective initiatives to aid first-year student transitions (Apriceno et al., 2020; Booker & Brevard, 2017; Pino et al. 2012).

Given the number and variety of interventions utilized across institutions, the observation Hunter (2006) made is critical and still applicable today. She noted that

institutions doing first-year initiatives well utilize multiple collaborative programs and choose which ones they implement based on the needs of their specific student body. In fact, effective campus FYE programs will need varied approaches even among their own students since students' needs differ and some students arrive better equipped to handle the stresses associated with starting college (Johson et al. 2010). Considering this, rather than trying to discuss the full range of initiatives, I have chosen instead to highlight a few types of practices and goals that can be achieved through different interventional means.

Informing Students. On the most basic level FYE programs provide information to students about the institution they have chosen to attend and "provide individuals with a holistic view of the new college experience" (Mack, 2010, p.5). Even this most basic approach, often in the form of a summer or start-of-semester orientation, has demonstrated an ability to improve student outcomes (Smith et al., 2012). Over time, however, it has been understood that the college transition process lasts for weeks or even months and students may not recognize the need for such information at the very start of their college careers. In addition, while helping students to a certain degree, most institutions have recognized this is only the most rudimentary level of support and additional forms of support are required.

Facilitating Social Connections. Another important way institutions can aid first-year transitions is by helping students cultivate social connections. In a study of more than 100 first-year students, Leary and DeRosier (2012) found that developing a sense of belonging through connecting with other people reduced stress and improved the transition experience. Though their study included a small portion of non-traditional students in the sample of 530, Meehan and Howells (2018) reaffirmed the role social

connection plays for first-year students. Focused specifically on first-year seminars, Cambridge-Williams et al. (2013) found that participation facilitated student connection and yielded additional benefits which included increased retention, academic performance, and graduation rates. These results also align with the work Inkelas et al. (2016) did with students in Living and Learning Communities which they defined as "residential communities with a shared academic or thematic focus" (p. 405). In that study, they found that such communities facilitated better college transitions, especially in the areas of both social connection and academic transition.

As colleges and universities have developed approaches to establish these social connections, Wang (2014) made an important observation that "teachers who share demographic characteristics with… students (e.g., socioeconomic status and ethnicity/culture) should minimize power distance and share relevant stories about their own experiences that help… students see that they have the potential to persist" (p. 78). While Wang spoke specifically about faculty, her work points to a broader need for diverse institutional representatives to be involved in the FYE work. Research also indicates that those trying to lead social integration efforts need not be only faculty or staff. In fact, Mattanah et al. (2010) found that peer social support groups were effective in aiding first-year student transitions. The literature indicates that colleges and universities can effectively include a wide variety of actors in efforts to encourage student social connections.

Academic Support. First-year initiatives have also addressed students' need for study skills and other forms of academic support (Wernersbach et al., 2014). While they may seem like basic parts of learning, Gibney et al. (2011) demonstrated the importance

of first-year students attending lectures, completing assignments, and managing their own studies. When studying community college students, Simmons (2006) found that only about 21% felt they knew how to study well and sizable majorities felt students in general would benefit from guidance on how to take notes, take exams, listen better, and manage their time. Looking at students who had actually received such training, Howard et al. (2018) examined a college course designed to teach reading and study skills. In that study they found that 95% of students reported that they derived some benefit. In addition to learning how to better acquire information, the students also noted improved test-taking and time management. In a similar vein, Wernersbach and colleagues (2014) found that not only did a 7-week course improve the skills themselves, but students also demonstrated gains in academic self-efficacy, their confidence in their ability to learn and complete academic tasks.

In addition to teaching academic skills, institutions have also found that tutoring aids student transition. While this particular intervention could be categorized as a program, the different ways in which it is currently implemented warrant its inclusion. While historically done by faculty, the literature today suggests that the majority of college tutoring is done by other students, though the format in which that takes place and the content included vary widely (Arco-Tirado et al., 2020; Walvoord & Pleitz, 2016). When they studied the effects that peer tutoring had on first-year students, Arco-Tirado and Fernández (2011, as cited in Arco-Tirado et al., 2020) found improvement not only in student grades but also the authors also reported that student improved their learning strategies. Almost a decade later those same researchers, working in partnership with Miriam Hervás-Torres, demonstrated that refining the tutoring methods could further

improve student academic performance (Arco-Tirado et al., 2020). Colver and Fry (2016) contributed important research to this area when they established that while it was beneficial for a range of students, peer mentoring was especially helpful for first-generation students.

      Teaching Students to Strategize. Another important aspect of effective FYE initiatives is that they teach first-year students how to develop effective strategies. Clark (2005) found that when students encounter difficulties, they enact strategies in response. Critically, however, some of the strategies can be helpful while others can be harmful. For example, when students felt like they couldn't ask questions in class, some asked friends or sought tutoring while others simply withdrew and hid in the back of the classroom. Within this larger framework of developing coping strategies, Kneeland and Dovidio (2020) found that it was important to help students learn to manage their emotions. Part of this involves recognizing that emotional responses don't have to be fixed and students can exercise some control over their feelings. On a more basic level, which would not even require any training, Kerr et al. (2004) also highlighted the need for spaces and relationships in which students are simply able to discuss their feelings.

      Regardless of the type of intervention, however, college and universities should not merely wait for first-year students to identify and seek help for these programs. As an example of the need for a preemptive approach Hu and Ma (2010) found that compared to other students in the mentoring program "first-generation students tend to be less likely to be involved" with their mentor (p. 337). While discussing advising in particular, Kurland and Siegel (2013) also advocated for proactive or intrusive practices where staff reach out to students in anticipated times of need rather than waiting on the student to

contact them. While there is value in simply making students aware of programs and services (Smith et al., 2012), there are times when institutional representatives must intentionally initiate contact with students in their efforts to provide support (Kurland & Siegel, 2013). As an example of a modest outreach effort, Pugatch and Wilson (2018) discovered that sending a simple one-time message to students yielded a seven percent increase in student participation in a tutoring program. They also found a six percent increase in the number of students who attended multiple tutoring sessions. Institutions need to take the initiative in making students aware of and connecting them to campus resources and programs throughout their first year, not just upon their arrival.

Though considerable work has been done to understand ways in which difference FYE initiatives there is a need for additional research. First, as Louie (2007) indicated there is a need to incorporate students' voices into the research on these practices. Secondly, he called for qualitative research to understand the process at work. This study of how peer mentors assist the transition of first-year students aims to address both of these concerns.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Schlossberg's Transition Framework</h3>

Recognizing the frequency and prominence of change in modern society, Nancy Schlossberg originally developed the Transition Framework in the early 1980s and has subsequently revised it in partnership with Mary Anderson and Jane Goodman (Anderson et al., 2021). The framework was created to provide a structure for understanding life-altering junctures in the lives of individuals. The framework, also commonly referred to as the transition theory or transition model, defined a transition as something that "results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 26).

While the particular transitions, circumstances, and people involved will inevitably vary, the model was designed to provide a consistent and dependable structure by which any change whether "anticipated or unanticipated, positive or negative, a success or a failure, or an event or a nonevent" (Anderson et al, 2021, p. x) can be understood. Patton et al. (2016) highlighted the breadth of the model's applicability stating that it "includes an examination of what constitutes a transition, different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions" (p. 37).

The Transition Framework, as depicted in Figure 2.1, is composed of three major parts: 1) Approaching Transitions, 2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources, and 3) Taking Charge (Anderson et al., 2021). The process starts by identifying what changes are taking place in the life of the individual. In part two the impetus is on identifying and utilizing the resources available to help cope with the transition. The accessibility and types of available resources have a substantial impact on how a person deals with transitions they must navigate. Over time the individual moves through the parts of the framework until the transition becomes a normal part of that person's everyday life.

This study utilized the first two phases of the framework because I believe that while the mentors could have a role in helping students understand and learn to cope with the transition to college, the assimilation process must ultimately be done by the mentees. The mentors could not implement those life adaptations for the first-year students. While the mentors would be able to provide help through additional cycles of sense-making and strategizing related to new changes the first-year students encounter or old, ongoing ones they must readdress, the mentors could not make life changes on behalf of the first-year

students. Since they constituted the theoretical framework for this study, I will expound on parts one and two of the transition model.

Figure 2.1

Stages of Schlossberg's Transition Framework

Stage 1
Approaching Tranistions
•Type
•Context
•Impact

Stage 2
Coping with Changes
The 4 S System
• Situation
• Self
•Support
• Strategies

Stage 3
Taking Charge
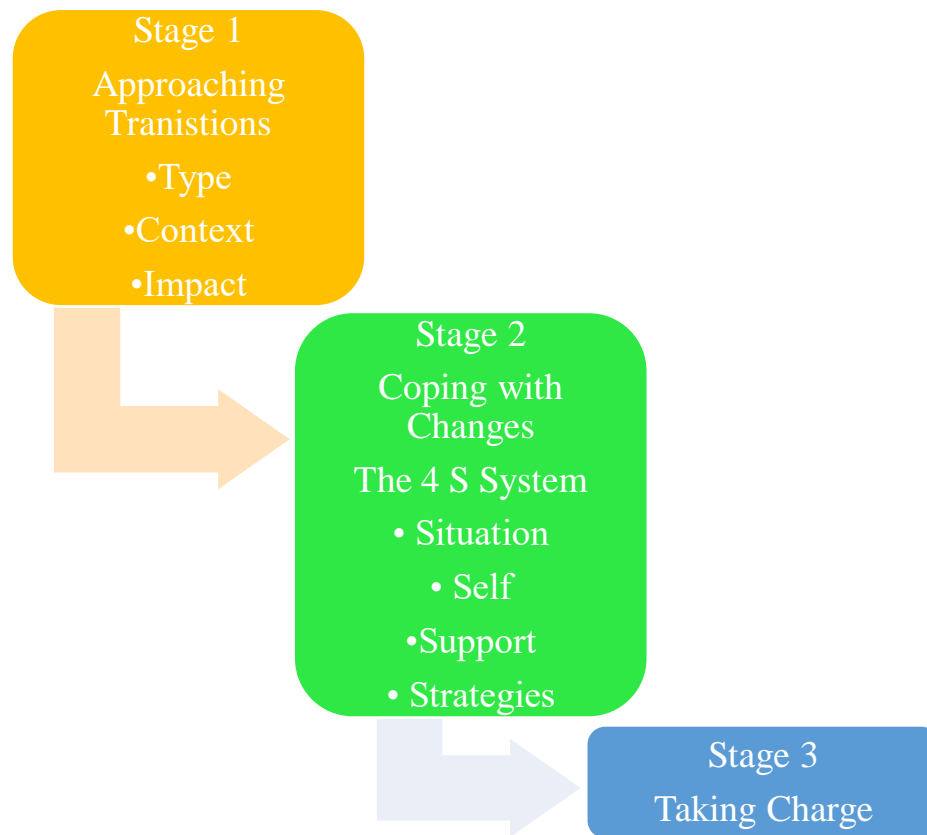
The first part of the framework, Approaching Transitions, focused on recognizing the type of change that has taken or might be taking place. The model started by including two pairs of categories within which transitions could be understood. For the first pair, the framework distinguished between anticipated and unanticipated transitions, with the latter being characterized by the lack of any opportunity to prepare. This is conspicuously different from anticipated transitions where arrangements can be made ahead of time with options formulated and weighed before a decision is taken (Anderson

et al., 2021). For the second categorical pair, the framework differentiated between event and nonevent transitions. For events, something has actually transpired, while for nonevents something that was expected has failed to come to fruition. Anderson et al. (2021) indicated nonevents could include things like "the marriage that never occurred, the promotion that never materialized, the child who was never born, or the false-positive cancer diagnosis" (p. 28).

In addition to these two pairings, the model also incorporated other concepts to guide the understanding of transitions. The first of these was perspective, whereby the framework recognized that even otherwise identically named or classified changes, such as retirement, could be experienced quite divergently by different individuals. Retirement might, for example, be planned and eagerly awaited by one person, while being forced, unexpected, and negative for someone else. Perspective is indispensable because "one's appraisal clearly influences how one feels and copes with the transition" (Anderson et al., 2021). Next, the model included context, which acknowledged the ways an individual's characteristics and their relationship to the change in question can lead to different experiences and outcomes. Personal history, family situation, location, historical events, as well as other interpersonal relationships are just some of the factors that can combine to demarcate the context in which the transition occurs as well as the reaction to it and the resources available to respond.

The final aspect of stage one was impact, which evaluated how much the transition in question actually modifies the day-to-day life of the person (Anderson et al., 2021). This included consideration of the number of, and specific realms of a person's life altered by the transition. For example, a particular transition might affect only the

work or personal life of the individual. Alternatively, a long-distance move would likely dictate changes in work life, personal relationships, schooling for children, etc. Transitions with high impact can even influence one's self-image and understanding. The number and magnitude of the changes included in a transition are essential as "we may assume that the more the transition alters the individual's life, the more coping resources it requires and the longer it will take for assimilation or adaptation" (Anderson et al., 2021, p.2).

The second part of the transition model focused on assessing the resources available to help in managing the transition. The model accounted for the reality that each individual has different resources on which they can draw and therefore will cope with change in distinctive ways. The process of coping is about balancing various forces affecting the individual as they "have both assets and liabilities as well as resources and deficits as they experience transitions" (Anderson, 2021, p. 40). Schlosberg's model used the 4 S system to describe four factors – Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies – that influence how a particular individual reacts to and manages transitions. These various factors and their constituent parts, shown in Figure 2.2, can manifest as either assets that aid the transition or liabilities that make it more difficult. Whether a given factor is an asset or a liability again depends on the individual. For someone with a supportive family, those relationships could be an asset. Alternatively, a belligerent spouse or parent could become a source of concurrent stress instead of a means of support.

Figure 2.2

The 4 S System

- Trigger
- Concurrent Stress
- Timing
- Previous Experience
- Level of control
- Role Changes
- Duration

- Community Organizations
- Institutions
- Relationships
  - Intimate relationships
  - Family units
  - Network of friends

Situation

Support

- Gender
- Values
- Outlook
- Spirituality
- Commitment
- Resilience
- Sexual orientation
- State of health
- Ethnicity/culture
- Age and stage of life
- Psychological resources
- Socioeconomic status
- Ego development

Self

Strategies

- Responses that modify the situation
- Responses that address the meaning of the problem
- Responses that help to manage stress after it has occurred

The first S, Situation, is comprised of the following items.

- Trigger is about recognizing what initiated the transition.

- Timing considers when in life the transition takes place both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative is based on age, stage of life, etc., while qualitative considers whether the person is in a good, bad, busy, etc. phase of life.

- Control assesses whether the change is self-initiated or brought on by external influences as well as how much the individual "may perceive control or lack of control over their lives as they navigate transitions" (Anderson et al., 2021, p.45).

- Role change considers the positions a person holds and functions they perform as well as the way in which the various roles held may intertwine and influence each other. For example, a newlywed may have to adjust their time commitments at work.

- Duration factors in not only the length over which the transition takes place but also the term for which that change is expected to last. Something, even negative, that can be seen as temporary rather than long-term or permanent can be adapted to differently.

- Previous experience recognizes that success or failure in prior, similar circumstances will impact how an individual reacts.

- Concurrent stress factors in whether the individual is having to manage additional transitions at the same time. If transitions overlap, then the difficulty in handling them is increased.

- Assessment focuses on how the person understands the situation and their relationship to it including the aspects just discussed. For example, the person's

assessment of whether the change was voluntary or forced with impact the way

in which they approach it.

The model combined these to constitute the situation within which the transition occurs.

Schlossberg's second S, Self, recognized the individual's characteristics including socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, psychological resources, ego development, outlook, commitment, and values, as well as spirituality and resilience (Anderson et al., 2021). Particularly important to this understanding of self is the way in which different levels of the environment in which a person lives help to shape their self-understanding. For example, Anderson et al. (2021) discussed how the explanatory style a child learns from their parents and surroundings shapes how they learn to react to difficulties in life. The combination of traits within the cultural setting helps shape whether a person is optimistic or pessimistic, has self-efficacy or doubts their ability to make change, and whether they tend to be flexible or intransigent.

The third S in the coping part of the framework was Support. Critically, Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework recognized support most often "occur[s] through relationships (intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends), along with community organizations and institutions" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 53). The utility of the relationships cannot, however, automatically be taken for granted. Families may just as easily be sources of additional stress instead of or in addition to providing support. It is essential to recognize that certain transitions may remove or diminish the ability to access existing forms of support, "thus exacerbating the difficulties of those transitions" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 53). Relationships that have previously

served to "cushion the shock of unanticipated transitions and also sustain a sense of history and point of reference" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 53) are themselves affected. For example, starting college would likely entail relational changes in regard to friends and family who may been significant sources of support in navigating prior transitions. Critically, however, certain types of support loss may be somewhat mitigated in our current culture as virtual connections can augment, substitute for, or transform in-person ones (Anderson et al., 2021).

The fourth and final S, Strategies, recognized three types of coping responses. Anderson et al. (2021) identified those as "responses that modify the situation, responses that address the meaning of the problem, and responses that help to manage stress after it has occurred" (p. 54). These strategies function at different levels from personal to family and even communal. On a personal level, this might mean engaging in activities to alleviate stress like exercise, creative endeavors, or humor. Within families, this might involve counseling. On the community level, this might mean being involved in a local church or support group. Anderson et al. (2021) pointed out that a collective approach, sharing your problems with a support group, can be critical in dealing with some forms of stress. Additionally, certain issues of greater magnitude require larger, perhaps even societal level, responses that an individual alone cannot accomplish.

Higher Education Transition Research Using the Transition Framework

I will now situate Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework within the larger body of literature that has sought to understand and improve college transitions. I have structured this section based on some of the various college populations with whom the framework has been used. I have chosen to do this to

reinforce its applicability to a wide range of college students as well as to reflect the way in which the literature itself tends to be organized. Some studies focused on particular racial or ethnic groups while others considered certain majors or academic fields. This section lays the groundwork for utilizing Schlossberg's theory as the theoretical framework for this study.

Applicability of the Framework

Patton et al. (2016) highlighted the significance of the transition framework with its inclusion in their book on student development theory which "guides student affairs and higher education practice" (p. 4). Incorporation in this book suggests its use and acceptance for both higher education research and praxis. Furthermore, the transition framework has been utilized by multiple researchers to help understand the transitions students face when entering college. One of the attractive aspects of the transition framework is that is generally viewed as universally applicable to adults and has been used with a range of populations (Khan et al., 2021; Schooler, 2014). Below I will discuss examples of research that have used the Transition Framework to study the transition experience of different groups while also highlighting aspects of the framework the authors have used and ways the studies relate to that which I undertook.

Schlossberg's Transition Framework Applied to Differing Student Populations

Interestingly, despite the broad applicability of the Transition Framework, many of the studies on higher education utilizing it have focused on particular student populations rather than employing the theory more broadly. DeVilbiss (2014) noted this trend toward focusing on narrow populations, or what she termed sub-populations, in her study which used Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework to

understand college transition for conditionally admitted students. In the study, she argued that colleges should work to help students recognize their existing coping resources in addition to attempting to provide resources such as orientation programs. DeVibliss (2014) also recommended the application of the transition model as a means to understand "the transition from high school to college for traditional age, first-time, full-time students" (p. 200).

Foster (2018) considered a different sub-group starting higher education when she conducted her study of early college high school students transitioning to community college. In that study, she found Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) transition framework beneficial in differentiating between anticipated and unanticipated changes, including how the students coped differently based on whether students expected the change. Foster (2018) found that students not only struggled to cope with the unanticipated aspects of their transition to college life, but they also had greater difficulty finding or identifying modes of support in those cases.

Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework, and earlier versions of it, have also been applied to the experience of racially minoritized students starting college. Byrd (2017) used the model as a lens to examine the experience of African American and Hispanic students in a teacher education program at a predominantly white institution. Importantly, he found that different students relied on different types of support to navigate their transitions. He also observed that students often failed to take advantage of different types of support provided by the institution. Boyd-Sinkler et al. (2019) framed their study of underrepresented ethnic and racial groups entering college engineering programs using all three phases of Schlossberg's theory. This particular

publication, part of a larger qualitative study, undertook an exploration of the applicability of the transition theory as well as developed a codebook of language connecting said framework to the experience of minority students. Also working with minoritized students Schooler (2014), noting the wide applicability of the framework, applied it to the college transitions of Native American students. Drawing from Schlossberg and several other theories, she developed a Native American College Student Transition Theory.

While not a first-year transition, Lazarowicz (2015) did utilize the Transition Framework to help illuminate the experiences of transfer students moving from community colleges to four-year institutions. That study found that students were often unaware of the resources available to help them, available resources being an essential aspect of Schlossberg's framework. Working with a similar population five years earlier, Archambault (2010) "interpreted the transfer experience through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory in order to identify ways in which two-year colleges can better prepare students for transfer" (p. 2). Her work was particularly significant because it related to how institutions can assist students with transition by providing intentional support, something the mentors in this proposed study were expected to do.

Military veterans starting was college another group with whom Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) framework has been utilized. For example, Brown (2014) studied the experience of active-duty military members pursuing postsecondary degrees including specific needs they might have. She contended that "aligning the elements of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework with the experiences of the participants in this research study provides a greater understanding" of the challenges

they faced (Brown, 2014, p. 100). In particular, ideas of concurrent stress and support from the military structures as well as college employees proved significant for participants. Cole (2013), again working with veterans, laid out the need for academic advisors to utilize the Transition Framework to better meet the needs of these students.

Additionally, studies have also been conducted with non-traditional students, generally defined as those over the age of 27 (see for example Karmelita, 2020; Neber, 2018; Turner 2019). All three examples found the framework helpful in understanding the transition that students underwent. Turner's (2019) work is also interesting in that part of its sample overlapped with the aforementioned studies of military veterans within the larger non-traditional population. Meanwhile, Neber (2018) used the Transition Framework to develop a priori codes for data analysis, again demonstrating an ability to map student experiences of college transition onto Schlossberg's work. While I did not develop a priori coding, this demonstration of the ability to map student experience onto the transition theory affirmed its capability and viability for use in this study.

Khan et al. (2021) utilized the theory with international graduate students when their small study considered Pakistani students attending Chinese universities. Importantly, the study found that Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) framework was useful not only because of its applicability to a wide range of students but also its utility in one-on-one interactions with students. This latter point is important since it corresponds with the relationship the mentors had with their mentees in this study.

In one of the demographically broader, and more recent studies, Sullivan (2021) considered how participation in an orientation program affected student transition and engagement. In that study where the "4S variables helped determine what resources and

discrepancies students experienced" (p. 23), she found the orientation program was able to contribute to better college transition outcomes for students by better preparing them for the college transition.

Taken together these studies these studies demonstrated themes relevant to this proposed study. First, they showed that Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework can be a useful lens through which to examine college transitions with an extensive range of students. In fact, several of the publications called for researchers to employ the transition theory with more diverse student populations. Going into this study not knowing anything about the potential cases and associated mentees demographically, this wide applicability of the framework was important. Second, the literature showed that the transition experience of college students could successfully be mapped onto the Approaching Transitions and 4s parts of the framework. Third, these studies demonstrated that the framework can be utilized to assess the utility of one-on-one relationships like the one the mentors had with their mentees. Finally, the studies have shown the framework can be used in assessing the influence of interventions on the college transition process. Given these facts, Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) transition theory was appropriate for use as the theoretical framework for this study.

The Origins and Current Role of Mentoring

Now that Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework has been introduced, it remains for me to provide a foundational understanding of mentoring before considering how it is used as an intervention with college students. While mentoring may be considered by some to be a contemporary phenomenon because it has in recent decades garnered considerable attention in different aspects of society including

higher education, it is in fact an ancient practice that can be traced back thousands of years. Many attribute its origins to ancient Greece mythology from which we draw the name we use to describe such relationships today (Campbell et al., 2012: Chao et al., 1992; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Others suggest the concept dates back even further (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). The original meaning of the word was related to a "'father figure' who sponsors, guides and develops a younger person" (Ehrich et al., 2004, p. 4) in a field like art, music, or science. In the traditional structuring of the mentoring relationship, there is a more experienced mentor who is expected to share their knowledge and expertise with a protégé (Chao et al., 1992; Kram, 1995; Ragins & Kram, 2007). While there are numerous variations on this basic theme today, that mentor protégé dyad is the conceptual foundation of the subsequent iterations that have arisen since.

Ragins and Kram (2007) trace the emergence of the modern emphasis on mentoring to Daniel Levison's book *Seasons of a Man's Life* published in 1978. Several years later Kram (1983/1985) contributed to the growth of the subject with her analysis of how to improve the mentoring process. Kram's (1985) work focused on mentoring in the business realm where it was most prominent at the time. That sphere had recognized mentoring's utility for and contribution to career success when knowledge, wisdom, experience, and/or specific expertise are passed on from senior employees to those newer to the company (Broughton et al., 2019; Ehrich et al., 2004; Noe, 1988). Because of those origins and its relatively clearly defined boundaries, most of the research on mentoring has traditionally taken place in the corporate sphere and as a result, most definitions and conceptualizations of mentoring reflect that provenance (Cox et al., 2014). From this base in business practice and culture, mentoring spread into other realms through both public

and private initiatives to the point that Crisp et al. (2017) note that it has become "a national priority" (p. 14).

Attempts to Define Mentoring and Understand its Functions

Despite both the long history of mentoring and the recent emphasis on integrating it into a variety of settings, there is not a broadly accepted definition of mentoring. Crisp et al. (2017) highlighted Kram's attempt to provide a clear definition, which, while frequently used by scholars, still failed to gain consistent acceptance. Kram (1985) conceived mentoring as covering a "broad range of relationships between juniors and seniors and among peers" (p. 40) to aid in development. This lack of a widely accepted definition exists not only in the broader body of knowledge but also in writings specifically addressing mentoring in academia as well (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). This is not a new problem, as Noe (1988) noted the existence of multiple definitions and a lack of agreement about what exactly constitutes a mentoring relationship in higher education. In this regard, the expansion of the literature on mentoring did not help as definitions proliferated as new papers were published. While Jacobi (1991) already noted 15 different definitions at the time of her review of undergraduate student mentoring, the number ballooned in less than two decades to at least 50 different formulations in the extant literature (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Crisp et al, 2017). In part, this reflects variance in the types of mentoring programs, but as Jacobi (1991) noted the inability to agree on a definition also reflects a clear lack of consensus on how to conceptualize mentoring.

Given this lack of conceptual clarity, attempts have been made to offer greater precision. A common approach has been to look for areas of commonality, especially as it relates to the function of the mentoring relationship. Jacobi (1991) tried to bring some

coherence and precision by identifying five characteristics of mentoring relationships. First, mentoring relationships are helping and usually focused on achievement and growth. Second, the mentor serves three broad functions by providing: a) emotional and psychological support, b) career and professional development, and c) role modeling. Third, the mentoring relationship is reciprocal where both parties derive some benefit. Fourth, mentoring relationships are personal with direct interaction. Fifth, and finally, the mentor has greater experience, influence, and achievement within a particular context. Crisp and Cruz (2009) streamlined Jacobi's (1991) work somewhat to four points of consensus, which were reaffirmed by Crisp et al. in 2017. Those four points of consensus were:

1. Mentoring relationships are focused on the growth and development of students and can be constructed in various forms.

2. Mentoring experiences may include broad forms of support that include professional, career, and emotional support.

3. Mentoring relationships are personal and reciprocal.

4. Relative to their students, mentors have more experience, influence, or achievement within the educational environment (p.19).

This set of points will serve as the functional conceptualization of mentoring for this study.

Understanding Mentoring Through Research

While this study focuses on higher education, the recent emphasis on mentoring in different spheres of society such as business and later education is reflected in the existing scholarly literature on mentoring. It was in a study of career development that

research on mentoring found its genesis. The body of literature examining mentoring largely began in the 1970s with some empirical studies published a decade later (Girves et al., 2005). During the 1980s Kathy Kram authored some of the seminal works in this area of study (Chao & et al., 1992; Noe, 1988). In her works Kram (1983/1985) noted that most mentoring relationships fail to achieve their full potential, thereby demonstrating the need to understand and improve the process of mentoring. This call to address the deficiencies in mentoring efforts helped drive the interest in researching this important relationship.

In general, much of the body of literature since that time has been oriented toward a business setting and tended to focus on "advancing technical proficiencies" (Broughton et al., 2019). This skills-based approach along with attempts to define mentoring have largely been focused on the corporate world where "in effect, mentors pass on their professional legacy" (Girves et al., 2005, p. 453). Another prominent focus of mentoring research in the business world has been on the psychological benefits (Chao et al., 1992; Kram, 1985). So, while an expanding body of literature on mentoring is accumulating as a result of its growing profile, the business and medical fields have tended to be the focus for the majority of the inquiry on mentoring (Ehrich et al., 2004).

Mentoring on the College Campus

It is not known exactly when mentoring started in higher education. In her 1991 review of the literature, Jacobi made the case that mentoring may have long existed on college campuses, but through "natural or informal mentoring relationships" (p. 514). Where they did exist, these informational mentoring relationships seem to have been more common for graduate students than for undergraduates, though Jacobi (1991) noted

that the prevalence of even these informal graduate mentoring relationships seems to have varied widely from institution to institution. The influence of the business world on colleges and universities may have helped introduce more formal approaches to mentoring students or at least reinforced and expanded its role. Campbell et al. (2012) discussed these ties between business and higher education and correlated the rise of mentoring on campuses with the need to develop workplace leaders who can deal with "rapid advancements in globalization, technology, and societal development" (p. 595).

Early on, as structured programs were beginning to develop, evaluation was poor or non-existent (Elrich et al., 2004). Such studies as were available at the time often had methodological concerns and were not systematic in their approach (Jacobi, 1991). Even with these limitations, Jacobi (1991) tentatively reported the presence of indirect links between mentoring and positive student outcomes such as increased retention, psychosocial development, and improved academic achievement. Even though this was only an incremental step, Crisp et al. (2017) contended that Jacobi's work was foundational in "demonstrating the link between mentoring and undergraduate development and academic success" as well as identifying "mentoring as a critical component to undergraduate education" (p. 27). In addition to these important contributions, Jacobi also focused attention on the deficiencies in our understanding of mentoring in higher education and issued a challenge for scholars to expand our knowledge base (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

This admonition, though having been addressed by many scholars with laudable progress, remains unfulfilled. Almost two decades later Crisp and Cruz (2009) undertook a new review of the literature to assess what progress had been made since Jacobi's

(1991) work. While they found that scholarly work had progressed, it had failed to keep pace with the rate at which higher educational institutions around the country were implementing new mentoring programs. As part of that expansion, Crisp and Cruz (2009) noted a marked increase in formal mentoring programs created by colleges and universities. Positive progress had been made in affirming the provisional links between mentoring and college success noted by Jacobi (Elrich et al., 2004; Hu & Ma, 2010). Despite these gains Crisp and Cruz (2009) concluded the understanding of mentoring for college students was still hampered by three notable limitations within the extant literature: 1) a lack of consistent definition and conceptualization of mentoring, 2) a lack of methodologically rigorous studies, and 3) a lack of theory. As part of this "they found limited understanding regarding if, how, and why mentoring positively affects undergraduate students' development and academic success" (Crisp et al., 2017, p.28). This is a gap in our understanding that I contend still remains and which this study sought to address.

This gap in our understanding endures despite further development of the extant literature since 2009. The most recent reviews by Gershenfeld (2014) and Crisp et al. (2017) continued the established trend of noting important gains while still emphasizing the need for further scholarship. Gershenfeld (2014) accentuated the increasing stakes involved when she remarked on the rapidly mounting financial and human capital investments in college and university mentoring efforts. One of Gershenfeld's (2014) key contributions was an attempt to classify and rate the rigor of new studies on mentoring. It is also worth noting that she focused solely on programs designated for undergraduate students.

Crisp et al., in their 2017 monograph assessing mentoring for undergraduate students and the most recent sweeping survey, concluded that mentoring research had progressed greatly from its origins. The literature had strengthened our understanding about the benefits of mentoring. Almost all the studies the authors reviewed demonstrated positive outcomes for students in areas like "adjustment to college, development, academic progress, and success" (Crisp et al. 2017, p. 74.). Furthermore, the authors concluded that mentoring had been demonstrated to provide "a means of promoting social justice and equity and diversity, particularly in STEM fields" (Crisp et al. 2017, p.74.). Mentoring of college students has progressed to recognize and address some specific needs of different groups. Despite these impressive gains, there remains a need for ongoing research to address persistent conceptual, methodological, and theoretical deficiencies.

Mentoring and First-Year Students' Transitions to Higher Education

As this study sought to examine how mentors aid in the successful transition of first-year students to a university, I will now consider the intersection of mentoring and the transition to higher education in the literature. Critically it should be noted at the outset that numerous college mentoring programs exist to aid the transition of students to this new environment with emphases on areas like academic performance, retention, and socialization (Hall, 2007; Holt & Lopez, 2014; Irby & Boswell, 2016). Mentoring programs have become a common means by which "institutions of higher education worldwide…facilitate first-year student adjustment" (Holt & Lopez, 2014, p. 415). In fact, many mentoring programs are intentionally "designed to address problems experienced by new students to assist them in making the transition to university study"

(Hall, 2007, p. 7). Crisp et al. (2017) also stated that existing studies have demonstrated that "mentoring may buffer the impact of students' transition issues" (p. 40). The importance of such positive transition-related outcomes has, as previously noted, led to the proliferation of mentoring programs and some work has been undertaken to understand different aspects of this approach. Here I will analyze some of the extant studies and their relation to that summative claim.

Mentoring Supports Student Persistence and Academic Performance. The research on the mentoring of college students has demonstrated a variety of different positive academic outcomes starting with improved student persistence. Multiple studies have shown that mentoring leads to higher rates of continued enrollment when compared to students who were not mentored (Cutright & Evans, 2016; Flores and Estudillo, 2018; Hu and Ma, 2010). Hu and Ma (2010), analyzing survey data from program participants with quantitative methods, found that mentored students were more likely to remain enrolled. Their analysis controlled for a variety of potentially confounding factors including "gender, race/ethnicity, institutional type, high school preparation, parental education, student educational aspirations, and non-cognitive scores" (Hu & Ma, 2010, p. 337). Additionally, their results pointed to an interesting contrast. While they did not find a connection between the frequency of mentor/mentee meetings, they found that the willingness of mentees to utilize "their mentors for support and encouragement was positively related to the probability of persisting" (Hu & Ma, 2010, p. 337). In their study of mentored Latina/o students, Salas et al. (2014) also found clear connections between involvement with the mentoring program and student persistence. Similarly, Flores & Estudillo (2018) found that almost 2/3 of the participants in their study reported that

participation in a "mentoring program influenced their decision to remain on campus for the following semester" (p. 12).

Moving beyond this initial measure of success, the literature also indicates better academic performance among mentored students. Goff (2011) evaluated the outcomes of a mentoring program for first-year biology students with data from thousands of participants. The program, which was intended to aid student transitions, successfully produced positive gains in academic achievement. Building on this type of work, Hurd et al. (2016) conducted a broad quantitative study designed to look at how mentoring impacted economically disadvantaged and racially minoritized groups. While the study focused on natural mentoring relationships rather than formalized college programs, Hurd et al. (2016) found that first-year students who had greater numbers of mentoring relationships had higher GPAs.

Two years later Reynolds and Parrish (2018) studied issues of social class related to natural college mentoring relationships. They found that mentoring increased college attendance as well as academic performance. However, they noted these early gains with poor and lower socioeconomic status students did not result in higher graduation rates with the students they studied. The research further has shown that not only does mentoring help student persistence in college overall but also within specific fields of study as well. When Larose et al. (2011) studied academic and vocational mentoring with STEM students, their research demonstrated that mentoring programs can "facilitate academic integration and persistence among youth interested in these fields of study" (p. 433). Hernandez et al. (2017) demonstrated this when their study showed that mentoring

helped retrain underrepresented populations like "women and racial minorities in STEM disciplines" (p. 450).

In addition to these improvements, research has also revealed that mentoring helps students link the material they are learning in class to the real world, including future career options. Adler and Stringer (2018) found that when CPAs mentored undergraduate accounting students, they helped students connect their class materials with their anticipated profession while also providing them a wider perspective on available career options. Similarly, Weaver (2021) found that working with a mentor helped pre-education majors meet the goals they had established for themselves and helped prepare them for their future work as teachers.

Psychological and Social Benefits for College Students. In addition to these academic and career selection benefits, the literature on the mentoring of college students has also demonstrated psychological and social advantages for the students as well. Speaking broadly Flores and Estudillo (2018) found that 86% of mentored students said that mentoring improved their college experience. The previously mentioned study of economically disadvantaged and racially minoritized groups conducted by Hurd and colleagues (2016) found mentored students had lower levels of depression. Given these important benefits, it should be noted that the authors found at least 1/3 of students entered college with no such mentoring relationships and a significant number of those relationships lapsed by the second semester of enrollment.

In addition to mitigating depression, research has also shown that mentoring aids in identity development. Atkins et al. (2020) found that pairing students with research mentors in STEM fields helped develop a sense of scientific identity. The mentors

facilitated "identity verification for students" (Atkins et al.; 2020, p. 12) helping students confirm their self-perception through outside feedback. Drawing on a series of studies they conducted, Honkimäki and Tynjälä (2018) reported that mentoring was also associated with greater student agency, self-regulation, and cooperation.

This latter finding of increased cooperation also points to another area, the social realm, where peer mentoring research has indicated encouraging outcomes as well. To begin with, Cornelius et al. (2016) found that when mentees received "support and interpersonal resources from their mentors" those efforts from the mentors led to greater university engagement on the part of the mentees (p.201). Likewise, Flores and Estudillo (2018) reported that 93% of those of participated in mentoring said that it increased their campus involvement. In another aspect of social growth, Campbell et al. (2012) found that participating in a mentoring program helped students develop as socially responsible leaders.

Importance of the Relationship Between Mentor and Mentee. The gains that come from mentoring are not, however, automatic and the extant research indicates that the nature and quality of the mentor/mentee relationship is essential to its success. For example, Lunsford's (2011) study found that when there is a lack of connection with the assigned mentor, the student does not feel like someone is mentoring them, regardless of the amount of time invested. Likewise, Reddick's (2011) study of mentoring with African Americans found that trust between both parties was an essential aspect of the mentoring relationship. That trust is necessary so that both mentor and mentee can be transparent and share openly with one another (D'Abate & Eddy, 2008). To this end, D'Abate & Eddy (2008) also stressed the need for good communication in the mentoring partnership.

Similarly, Behar-Horenstein et al. (2010) found that both parties must learn to listen to one another.

Mentors also must be accessible to their mentees and demonstrate an ongoing commitment in order for the relationship to be effective (Behar-Horenstein et al. 2010; D'Abate & Eddy, 2008; Jones & Goble, 2012). While this would seem to place the impetus solely on the mentor, several studies have shown that both mentor and mentee must be committed to making the relationship work (Jones & Goble, 2012; Lunford, 2011). With that in mind it should be noted that while the primary focus of mentoring is developmental, spending time socializing is important to establishing and maintaining the relationship (Jones & Goble, 2012). Socializing also allows the mentors to help mentees connect to existing community networks. While these are generally associated with effective relationships in general, the literature indicates they cannot be overlooked in mentoring even though the focus is likely to be primarily on personal development for the mentee.

Pairing Mentors and Mentees. Given the importance of the relationship between mentor and mentee, scholarship has examined what factors should be considered when constituting mentoring pairs. One of the key questions in this area has been the degree to which mentor and mentee need to share common demographic traits. Several studies have shown that overlap in demographics can be helpful when mentoring college students. In 2014 Salas and colleagues examined the mentoring of Latinx students. They found the program, which parried the students with a Latinx mentor, helped address issues of culture shock. This approach allowed the students to connect to someone with similar experiences and enabled the mentoring program to provide a "sense of family and

community, which encouraged them to do better" (Salas et al., 2014, p. 238). Also working with Hispanic students, Cox et al. (2014) found that cultural factors affected the efficacy and longevity of the mentoring relationship. Reddick (2011) also affirmed the utility of a shared cultural background in his consideration of Black undergraduate students. He asserted that that a shared cultural background enhanced the mentoring connection. The differences related not only to cultural differences but to gender as well. For example, Langer's (2010) study reported a difference in the mentoring style of male and female mentors, the latter being "more compassionate with students" (p. 35).

Based on these findings it would be easy to conclude that the best approach would be to simply pair students with a mentor based on demographic matching. This, however, is not always possible and the research does offer a more nuanced view. Girves et al. (2005) added to this dialogue by pointing out that while cultural similarities can contribute to the utility of mentoring, it is not a prerequisite for success in the mentoring process. The significance of this insight should be not overlooked since "individual mentors can only work with a limited number of mentees (Girves et al., 2005, p. 459). This aligns with the broader findings from the previously cited Cox et al. (2014) study. There the authors found that while cultural similarity could be helpful, they determined that the fit between and mentee was more complex than that single factor. Their conclusions supported a focus on the importance of aligning the needs of the mentee with what the mentor is willing and able to provide (Cox et al, 2014). Hernandez et al. (2017) also affirmed that while demographic similarities can be important, the mentee's "perceptions of similarity with their mentor was the dominant factor influencing the quality of mentoring" (p.462). D'Abate & Eddy (2008) provided a well-balanced

summary of the approach to setting mentoring pairs when they asserted it is best to consider a range of factors including "compatibility, demographic similarity, personality, alignment of interests and values, developmental needs, and offerings" (p. 366).

Cautions Regarding the Mentoring Relationship. While research has shown mentoring to be an effective support for developing college students, some caveats and cautions are also in order. First, in line with what was just discussed, D'Abate & Eddy (2008) noted that a poor match between mentor and mentee may not only fail to support the students but can have deleterious consequences. Next, Jones and Goble (2012) cautioned that power imbalances associated with mentoring can be perilous. While the authors were particularly concerned with this since they were studying college students with intellectual disabilities, the warning is none the less applicable across mentoring partnerships more broadly. Several other concerns first noted by Long (1997) about a quarter century ago remain salient today. In addition to the problems already discussed, Long (1997) urged cautions because of the time-consuming nature of the mentoring process as well as the associated problem of overusing mentors, poor planning/preparation for the mentoring process, the possible tendency of the mentor to try and mold the mentor into their own image, as well as the tendency to use mentoring as a panacea to solve all problems.

When considering these concerns, an additional note from Langer's (2010) findings seems instructive. In that study, Langer (2010) found a number of cases where there was a significant difference between the perspective of the mentors and mentees concerning the success of the mentoring relationship. This points to the need to consider

all participants' perspectives not only at the inception of the mentoring relationship but also at later assessments of its health and utility.

The Necessity of Preparing Participants. With these concerns in mind, it is little surprise that one of the most consistent themes in the literature is the need for mentor training (D'Abate & Eddy, 2008; Jones & Goble, 2012). Campbell et al. (2012) found this was even true for faculty who mentored students. In particular, when comparing faculty and staff mentors, they found that faculty mentors benefited from training in student development. While faculty were experts in their fields, as might be expected, they did not do as well in student development mentoring as their student affairs counterparts (Campbell et al., 2012).

While mentor training is vital, the literature has also demonstrated the need for preparing both mentors and mentees (Gannon & Maher, 2012). This aligns with D'Abate & Eddy's (2008) call for a time of orientation and expectation setting. This structured approach to starting the mentoring relationship would allow expectations to be established at the start without the mentor having to assume what a student desires or needs. Langer (2010) noted that different students wanted distinctive things from their mentors. Some students focused more on personal connection while others, especially in STEM fields, concentrated more on academic support. This example is telling as the general expectation of STEM students that Langer (2010) discovered in his study ran counter to the typical trend discussed above. As another example, Reynolds and Parrish (2018) found that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often need different types of support. Their work found mentors of poorer students were often asked to fill in the gap that parents of more wealthy students often provide, not economically, but in

terms of social capital and experience navigating the college environment. In referring to social capital I am following Reynolds and Parrish (2018) as well as Soto (2008) who discussed social capital as a network of people with experience and expertise from whom an individual can draw information and support to help them in unfamiliar circumstances.

Peer Mentoring in Higher Education

As colleges and universities have recognized the value of mentoring students and started creating or expanding programs, one of the mounting challenges institutions have encountered has been finding enough mentors to meet students' needs. While traditionally college and university mentoring programs have been based on faculty mentoring students, as colleges have sought to increase the number of students being mentored this model has become untenable for many institutions (Birkeland et al., 2019; Reddick, 2011). In his 2011 research Reddick found, for example, that the demands of the promotion and tenure process have increasingly curtailed the ability of faculty to invest time in the mentoring of students. This has coincided with colleges and universities facing rising enrollment and shrinking budgets (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). These factors, combined with the earlier caveats about how a lack of time invested in mentoring can negatively affect outcomes, as well as the recognition that individuals can only mentor a fixed number of students, have led institutions to pursue alternate ways to mentor students.

As institutions have searched for different approaches, peer mentoring has emerged as an increasingly popular option (Gershenfeld., 2014; Gunn et al., 2017). Peer mentoring at colleges and universities deviates from more classic conceptions in that mentors are significantly closer in age and level of experience to their mentees than

would be the case in more traditional models (Douglas et al., 2013). Despite this fundamental difference from the structure of a traditional mentoring relationship, research has demonstrated peer mentoring to be an effective alternative that has yielded results commensurate with a student being mentored by an older adult. This section will explore some key findings in the extant literature on peer mentoring.

Academic Gains from Peer Mentoring

As with mentoring in general, studies of peer mentoring have shown it contributes to increased academic performance (Cutright & Evans, 2016; Fox et al., 2010; Yomtov et al., 2017). This broad assertion was captured well by Colvin and Ashman (2010) when they reported that "students and mentors agreed that one of the major benefits of having (or being) a mentor was doing better in school" (p. 131). While this type of broad description used to portray mentoring results is fairly common, some studies have provided more detail on different aspects of what that improved academic performance entailed. For example, Douglas et al. (2013) considered paid peer mentors who were assigned to mentor students in class sections of a writing intensive course. The researchers found that peer mentoring led to considerable improvement in student writing abilities. This was particularly true when the mentors had previously taken the specific class in which a student was enrolled. Consideration of this study does carry one critical stipulation, however. Based on how Douglas et al. (2013) defined the mentoring role, some might consider the relationship studied to be more one of peer tutoring, than peer mentoring.

In another study, which reflected a broader definition of mentoring, Flores and Estudillo (2018) reported on how peer mentoring contributed to the academic and social

integration of first-year students. Their mixed methods approach was focused on first-year students transitioning to college, especially underrepresented populations. The study found that peer mentors helped students improve important academic skills like learning how to study and prioritize their time. The peer mentors were also effective at either connecting students with campus tutoring resources or in some cases tutoring their mentees themselves. Ward et al. (2012) also found that peer mentoring helped students develop "academic skills and knowledge, included growth in such areas as being organized, time management, study habits (e.g. note-taking), paper-writing, and knowledge and specific skills pertinent to specific academic areas (e.g. mathematics, chemistry, history)" (415).

In addition to these specific skill gains, research has also shown improved student performance across several domains of assessment. Employing one of the most widely used measures of student achievement, Asgari & Carter (2016) considered the grades of students in introductory courses. They found students who had a peer mentor showed improvement in test scores over the course of the semester. It should also be noted that improvement was even present for students who scored below the class average. In another study, Chester et al. (2013) focused on first-year psychology students. Their work demonstrated that peer mentoring led to significant increases in deep and strategic learning as opposed to just surface learning. This was associated with superior subject mastery by students who were mentored.

A couple of studies have also indicated that peer mentoring can help students learn how to navigate the academic environment. Colvin and Ashman (2010) found that when students were having difficulties, they were often more comfortable approaching

their peer mentor for feedback instead of their professor. In another words the mentor provided forms of support the student might otherwise not have sought out. However, they also found that peer mentors could then use that as an opportunity to act as a liaison between students and faculty. When approached the peer mentors could help connect students with faculty facilitating that connection. In related findings, Ward et al. (2012) reported that peer mentors often taught their mentees how to interact with professors, including how to initiate conversations.

In 2017 Gunn et al. reported a couple of other findings related to improved academic outcomes. While affirming the improvement in academic skills previously mentioned, Gunn et al. (2017) also found that peer mentoring supported students in learning how to reach their academic goals. Effective mentors were able to help students translate these improved skills into progress toward objectives they wished to achieve. In accordance with mentoring in general Gunn et al. (2017) also noted increased retention among mentored students. Research has also demonstrated discipline-specific retention gains. Studying STEM students, Holland et al. (2012) found that mentored students were more likely to be more satisfied with and remain in their selected STEM major. The work of Cutright & Evans (2016) further supported these conclusions. They noted that mentoring improved student retention improved and students were more likely to stay in STEM fields of study.

Social Benefits

Improvements in student outcomes resulting from peer mentoring are not limited to academics. Like mentoring in general, peer mentoring can also yield social and psychological advantages for students. For example, Flores and Estudillo (2018) reported

that peer mentors helped first-year students integrate into campus life by "encouraging their mentees to join a campus-organization, volunteer, or attend campus events" (p. 16). In this capacity mentors can act "as an integrating agent, introducing new students to one another and helping them feel more at ease within the university social environment" (Collings et al., 2014, p. 940). Flores and Estudillo (2018), however, cautioned that mentors should balance this guidance, by encouraging students not to stretch themselves too thin by trying to become involved in too many things. Flores and Estudillo (2018) further exhorted that mentors should guide mentees to make deliberate choices that aligned with the mentees' interests and college goals. That same year Moschetti et al. (2018) observed that "mentees reported increased integration and connection to the university" resulting from having a mentor (p. 386). This type of integration came about as mentors helped their mentees "learn to navigate a new environment, such as the university" (Moschetti et al., 2018, p. 386). This provided the students with social capital and helped the develop a sense that they belonged on the campus (Flores & Estudillo, 2018; Moschetti et al, 2018). This sense of belonging and feeling welcomed was especially important for underrepresented groups according to Holland et al. (2012) in their work with students in STEM fields.

Ward et al. (2012) provided great insight into how this social connectedness that came from having a peer mentor can serve as a foundation for student development. The authors reported:

> This broad theme included a variety of types of growth experiences, such as the following: overcoming extreme shyness/insularity through regular interaction with caring others and becoming more comfortable and confident with meeting

people and making new friends; overcoming being antisocial; developing a desire

to participate more in campus activities; feeling like one is supported and belongs

(being part of a family at school); or trusting someone else in an intimate

relationship (, p. 417)

These studies all point to how peer mentoring can support the healthy social development

of students as well as their integration into the campus community. Establishing this new

social network is critical as Collings et al. (2014) also reported that first-year students

"experienced a decrease in perceived social support from pre-entry friendships" (p. 940).

Additional Benefits of Peer Mentoring

The research also indicates additional areas where students benefit from peer

mentoring. First, Gunn et al. (2017) found that peer mentoring helped confirm the career

trajectory of students. Going further, Weaver et al. (2021) reported that pre-education

majors conveyed feeling better prepared to enter the teaching profession after being

mentored by a graduate student. That mentoring experience helped teach the mentees

how to connect the knowledge and skills they had learned in class to real world

situations. The study found this increased the confidence and self-efficacy of those pre-

education majors (Weaver et al., 2021). Similarly, Holland et al. (2012) found that

successful peer mentoring helped strengthen students' future plans for a STEM career.

Collings et al. (2014) reported that peer mentoring also improved students' self-esteem.

Returning once more to Gunn et al. (2017) the authors found, in addition to the

previously discussed benefits, some mentees felt that they were helped by their mentor

serving as a role model that could emulate. In a perhaps broadly related finding, the last

benefit I want to mention in this section relates to mentor replication. Interestingly,

Holland et al. (2011) discovered that students who had received peer mentoring more likely to be willing to serve as a peer mentor themselves.

Peer Mentoring Also Benefits the Mentors

Reciprocity, a different form of that word, or a synonym are commonly discussed as a prerequisite for a healthy mentoring relationship in the extant literature. That is to say that both parties give and receive as part of the relationship. While this is true for mentoring in general it is particularly true for peer mentors. One of the important findings in the research on peer mentoring has been that this reciprocity also carries over into the benefits derived from the mentoring relationship. The research on peer mentoring shows that while mentees certainly benefit from the relationship, peer mentors are also rewarded because "Through mentoring novice peers, mentors gained a higher-level mastery of course content and career skills including project management and presentations" (Marshall et al., 2021, p. 100). Put another way, assisting their peers as a mentor can help improve the mentor's own knowledge and skill through trying to teach their mentee (Weaver et al., 2021).

Concisely stated by Gunn et al. (2017), serving as a peer mentor functions as a type of applied learning that develops an assortment of skills. The literature indicates that many who served as peer mentors discovered and honed skills like interpersonal interaction, communication, organization, self-awareness, problem-solving, adaptability, leadership, and responsibility (Haber-Curran et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2021). Expanding on a couple of these, serving as a mentor was often a time when mentors learned how to "balance between being friendly and being professional" (Haber-Curran et al., 2017, p.495). Regarding communication, mentors learned how to express

their thoughts more clearly, especially in a professional manner. According to Marshall et al., (2021):

> Mentors described gaining both broad relational skills and specific teaching skills. These included how to listen to others, how to provide both positive and negative feedback, how to help without helping too much, and how to manage group dynamics and resolve conflict (p.97).

Research has also demonstrated that serving as a peer mentor can increase different forms of self-awareness. Students who peer-mentored others reported developing a better understanding of their personality characteristics, including strengths and weaknesses (Marshall et al, 2021). The mentors also increased their perception of themselves as a leader and developed leadership skills. Finally, the mentors discovered a better understanding of their relationship to their potential career fields as they helped their mentees process their journey.

Cautions and Caveats Related to Peer Mentoring

Some studies have offered critical words of caution as they examined other aspects of peer mentoring in the college setting, not just the positive contributions such relationships can make. One important concern in peer mentoring is the power dynamic between mentor and mentee. In 2010 Colvin and Ashman issued a significant warning when they reminded readers that:

> The nature of the relationship, *mentor* and *mentee*, reflects hierarchical ordering. Thus help, power, and resources tend to flow in one direction, creating the possibility for misunderstanding or misuse of such power and resources and leading to challenges and resistance" (p. 131, italics in the original)

Building on Colvin and Ashman's work, Christie (2014) undertook a study to examine the power dynamics present in a college peer mentoring program. In that study she cautioned that because of the power they hold, mentors may tend to socialize mentees "into particular ways of thinking and being" (Christie, 2014, p. 961). The mentors can shape the mentees' understanding of what it means "to work effectively within this community" while also holding considerable sway of the "mentee's success by passing on cultural values and norms which help them to succeed at university" (Christie, 2014 p. 960). Within this unequal power structure, Christi (2014) also raised concerns about mentees becoming too dependent upon or having unrealistic expectations from their mentors.

Due to these concerns about the potential misuse of positional power, Christie, (2014) called for structured training of peer mentors that clearly communicates "expectation[s] about the roles of the various people involved" (p.959). She is not the only scholar to advocate strongly for quality training programs for peer mentors, though other studies sometimes issued such calls for varied reasons. Other scholars have also issued calls to clearly delineate the scope, goals, and expectations for the mentoring relationship. (Fox et al., 2010; Gunn et al. 2017). As a case in point, Colvin and Ashman (2010) worried that lacking defined expectations and boundaries, mentors might find themselves trying to do too much. Reinforcing this point Marshall et al. (2021), found that peer mentors sometimes had difficulty understanding their role reporting that "learning what it meant to be a mentor was challenging for them" (p.100).

Training and Support for Peer Mentors

One fundamental way to address these and other potential concerns is to train peer mentors. One of the key needs Ehrich et al. (2004) identified for mentoring programs in higher education generally, was to train mentors. This need would seem to be particularly acute for peer mentors. While training can be helpful for anyone planning to serve as a mentor, it is especially important for peer mentors who need professionals to help teach them needed skills (Lin et al., 2016; Yomtov et al., 2014). For example, Hall and Jaugietis (2011) noted that the peer mentors in their study were trained by the University Counseling Service. Goff (2011) suggested peer mentors might benefit from a range of campus personnel such as "residence life services, career services, student development, health services… etc." (p.8).

Lim et al. (2017) further suggested that this ought not be a one-time training, but rather an ongoing regime of training and support for the mentors. Holt and Lopez (2014) described such an approach where mentors received two days of initial training but also received ongoing instruction and support on a bi-weekly basis. Lin et al. (2016) summarized this well when they opined that 'peer mentors should undertake pre-training as well as on-the-job training with the help of professionals with different expertise" (p.437).

These trainings conducted by campus professionals can and should cover a wide range of topics. As an example, peer mentors can benefit from training in seemingly simple areas like building relationships with their mentees. Marshall et al. (2021) found that mentors sometimes struggled connecting with their mentees, especially when the mentees were less academically driven. Cutright and Evans (2016) suggested that to

further support mentors in this particular area, mentoring programs may need to provide structured times for mentors and mentees to interact. Lin et al. (2016) also noted peer mentors in their study, in addition to relational training were also taught "helping skills, life principles, and campus administrative procedures offered by Office of Student Affairs" (p.442). Gunn et al. (2017) reaffirmed this type of approach when they wrote:

> Potential peer mentors should participate in orientation sessions geared to all aspects of the program, so that they feel comfortable with (a) assisting mentees with academic, social, and personal challenges, (b) role modeling, (c) sharing academic and social experiences and challenges, (d) connecting mentees to campus resources, and (e) helping mentees develop academic skills in order to be more successful at the university level (p. 23).

There is a clear trend in the literature that calls for quality professional training to help mentors understand their roles as well as ongoing training and support to help them assist their mentees.

The Need for Additional Research

Despite the growing body of literature that establishes the ways in which mentoring of first year college students is linked to positive educational and personal outcomes like retention, higher GPAs, vocational discernment, developing a sense of community, as well as lower rates of depression and anxiety (Campbell et al., 2012; Girves et al., 2005; Hurd et al., 2016; Salas et al., 2014), there remains a key lack of knowledge about how and why mentoring works in the college and university setting to help students transition successfully (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). The literature offers some insights such as the ability of mentoring to help students find new people to provide

personal support (Collings et al., 2014). This may be by providing that support themselves (Hu & Ma, 2010) or connecting mentees to other existing resources (Flores & Estudillo, 2018).

The literature also illustrates what Andreanoff (2016) refers to as the "issues" related to quantitative studies of mentoring in higher education. As previously discussed, there is a lack of generally applicable quantitative instruments to assess mentoring. Quantitative approaches have as a result employed the use of surveys or have had to repurpose other tools. As Andreanoff (2016) noted and has been seen in the literature, mentoring studies also often lack sufficient participants to allow for meaningful quantitative analysis. The literature also demonstrates the common use of qualitative methods to study mentoring, the decision taken for this particular study. In this case, the decision is based on the types of questions covered in this study and the appropriateness of qualitative case study methodology to answer them, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Summary

The transition to college for first-year students is an exciting, but potentially perilous time. Due to the importance of that transition time and the long-term consequences tied to its outcome for various parties involved, there have been numerous attempts to study and improve that transition experience for first-year students. As one among many interventions that have been utilized and studied, mentoring has proven effective in supporting students in assorted ways including academically, socially, and psychologically. As colleges and universities have tried to expand mentoring while navigating larger students' enrollment, tighter budgets, and increasing demands on

faculty's' time, peer mentoring has gained popularity. This approach, which entails using older students to mentor younger students, has shown positive results and can provide mentees "great benefit in their transition into university life" (Cornelius et al., 2016, p.201).

However, Gunn et al. (2017) caution that "despite a large body literature on the topic of mentoring, there seems to be a lack of focus on the topic of student-to-student mentoring" (p, 15). Within this Gunn et al. (2017) also note that there is a lack of research that considers the perspective of both mentors and mentees. In addition, Lunsford (2011) pointed to what I contend is an even more fundamental and pressing concern when she noted that "there is remarkably little empirical research regarding how mentoring works" (p. 474). This study aims to begin addressing that need. Utilizing Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework this study seeks to understand how peer mentors contribute to the successful college transition of first-year students.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction to the Problem

There is a disconnect between our knowledge about how to design and implement mentoring programs for college students and the increased rate of their actual creation. Despite the widespread and expanding implementation of mentoring programs on college campuses (Gershenfeld, 2015) and the literature's longstanding acceptance of its value (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), extant information on the mentoring of college students remains significantly underdeveloped in key areas with important questions as yet unanswered. Gershenfeld (2005) stated succinctly, "Research on mentoring has not kept pace with the proliferation of undergraduate programs" (p. 365). Such research as has actually been done on mentoring in higher education indicates links to positive educational and personal outcomes like retention, higher GPAs, vocational discernment, developing a sense of community, and lower rates of depression and anxiety (Campbell et al., 2012; Girves et al., 2005; Hurd et al., 2016; Salas et al., 2014). There remains, however, a key lack of knowledge about how and why mentoring works with college and university students (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). In other words, despite a lack of research-based knowledge to guide program formation and evaluation, colleges, universities, and policymakers continue to create and expand mentoring programs from the local through the national levels. Since they are propounded to work, something that has been demonstrated in particular cases (see for example Campbell et al., 2012; Girves et al., 2005; Hurd et al., 2016; Salas, et al., 2014), these programs continue to proliferate even if not firmly grounded in theory or vetted practice.

What Coburn and Turner (2011) noted more broadly about educational research is pertinent to this topic as well, in that these types of disconnections are problematic "because understanding outcomes without understanding the mechanisms that produced them means that we have little insight into… interventions so as to increase their impact" (p. 101). In other words, knowing how and why something works can make it even more effective as well as more replicable. This study proposed to address one aspect of these deficiencies in the knowledge base and contribute to a greater understanding of mentoring in higher education by providing insight into how peer mentors aid first-time college students in their transition to the higher education environment.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand how peer mentors contribute to new, first-time, first-year students successfully transitioning into higher education.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the ways in which peer mentors assist the transition process of first-year students, we need a theoretical framework to structure the understanding of that process. This study utilized Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework, also referred to as the transition theory or transition model, as the means by which the alterations in new students' lives are understood. Nancy Schlossberg developed her Transition Framework to address times of change in the lives of adults. Originally focused on people entering retirement, it has, since that inception, been successfully utilized to provide insight into a variety of adult life changes. The framework identified transition as something that "results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 26). As noted in chapter one, at least one and oftentimes

multiple transitions are present in the lives of students when they start college. Schlossberg's framework was useful because as I will discuss below, it encompassed various aspects of students' lives and the myriad changes that may occur simultaneously.

Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework was comprised of three stages: Approaching Transitions, Taking Stock of Coping Resources, and Taking Charge. Those phases were designed to encompass the entire timeframe of the transition, commencing at the point where the person recognizes the change or potential change, and continuing until the transition has been assimilated into the individual's daily life. As previously discussed, this study utilized the first two phases of the framework. I chose to do so because I believe that while the mentors had a role in helping students understand and learn to cope with the transition to college, the assimilation process was ultimately the responsibility of the mentees and not something the mentors could do on their behalf.

In considering the influence of peer mentors on the transition of first-year students, the first part of Schlosberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) framework I utilized was stage one, Approaching Transitions. Given their individual histories, personalities, etc., first-year students understood the transition to college in varied ways. While something like college would be a planned transition, it is highly unlikely that students would have anticipated all the implications and secondary effects this decision involved. I expected that peer mentors would have a role in helping shape how first-year understood and approached some of these changes.

Likewise, each individual copes with change in distinctive ways. The second part of Schlosberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) framework proposed the 4 S system to describe four factors – situation, self, support, and strategies – that influence how a particular

individual reacts to and manages transitions. This process of coping is about balancing various forces affecting the individual as they "have both assets and liabilities and resources and deficits as they experience transitions" (Anderson, 2021, p. 40). I used this second part of the framework to search for ways in which the mentors helped the first-year students react to and address the changes they encountered.

The first S, Situation, was comprised of the trigger, timing, level of control, role change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, and the individual's assessment of the situation. The second S, Self, recognized the individual's characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, psychological resources, ego development, outlook, commitment, and values, as well as spirituality and resilience. The third in the framework S was Support. Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework identified support as a social network composed of different people and groups with whom someone has a relationship. The fourth and final S, Strategies, was about coping responses which can be sorted into three types: "responses that modify the situation, responses that address the meaning of the problem, and responses that help to manage stress after it has occurred" (Anderson et al., 2021., p. 54). These two parts of the Transition Framework structured the study of how peer mentors help students understand and manage the transitions associated with starting college.

Research Question

Research Question: How do peer mentors contribute to the successful college transition of first-time, first-year, traditional, undergraduate students?

- How do peer mentors, in light of the Approaching Transitions phase in Schlossberg's theory, help first-year students understand their college transition?

- In what ways do peer mentors directly provide support to first-year students to help them as they transition to college?

- With what other support resources, whether on or off campus, do peer mentors connect first-year students to help them as they transition to college?

- How do peer mentors help first-year students develop strategies to cope with the transition to college?

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was inseparable from the qualitative process since I conducted the data collection and analysis for this study functioning in essence as the "instrument of the research" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 45). For this reason, Creswell and Poth (2018) commented on how self-disclosure has become a common practice and extoled the importance that the researcher not only understand, but also articulate "their biases, values, and personal background' (p. 183). While Maxwell (2013) contended this exercise is primarily for the benefit of the author, Yazan (2015) also noted its utility to those reading the study. Such disclosure affords readers some understanding of the ways in which the experiences, thought processes, and relationships to the location, for example, that I brought with me as a researcher may have influenced this study, both helping and hindering and hindering it. In this section, I share things such as my beliefs, background, and relationship to the topic, and relationship to the site selected for this case.

Positionality

To help readers understand the perspective from which I approached this study, it is important that I relate my relationship with the topic. I was, over two decades ago, a college freshman and therefore went through the transition to college life. I did not, however, participate any in formal mentoring programs in college and was not aware of any such programs at my institution if they were available. I did, however, have a couple of informal mentors while completing my undergraduate studies. At various times a couple of different staff and faculty filled the role of mentor in an informal, unstructured way.

Professionally, I have been involved in various forms of formal and informal mentoring at colleges and universities for many years. Having served as a staff advisor to multiple student organizations over the years, I have been tasked with guiding and mentoring student leaders as well as organizational officers and members. I was also recruited and served as a mentor as part of a QEP program at an institution where I was previously employed. My interest in mentoring as an area of study also emanates from my professional work. Having spent about 20 years working on colleges and university campuses with the majority of that in different areas of Student Life, student transition, success, and retention have been central to my day-to-day work life. Furthermore, throughout almost all my time in Student Life, I have had direct or supervisory responsibility for various orientation and welcome events for students which were structured to help first-year students transition into higher education. This study reflected the intersection of some of these professional threads.

I did not, however, work at the institution where this study took place. I was an outsider and while this freed me of certain potential conflicts of interest in relation to participants, it also meant that I was far less familiar with the campus life, culture, and constituencies. I was also extremely dependent on gatekeepers to provide access to the potential participants than I might otherwise have been had I conducted the study at an institution where I had was employed. I think this outside perspective, however, may have allowed participants to be more forthcoming and candid in the information they shared for this study.

Researcher Epistemology and Ontology

In addition to my relationship with the proposed site of the study, my intellectual background and personal experiences also contributed to my understanding of and interaction with the phenomenon under consideration (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While my understanding of ontology and epistemology has developed and progressed over time, I began with a realist/positivist framework. Reflecting on the intersection of faith and reason, I believed from early on that reality was a tangible and comprehensible thing that could be understood with concerted effort. As a result, I have long understood that an essential function of education is to help people comprehend that essential reality. Differences in opinion were the result of people's imperfect and incomplete understanding of said reality. From a developmental standpoint, one would likely expect such a concrete approach at a young age, but I believe my beliefs at the time were as much based in studying philosophers like Plato or Aristotle as well as Christian authors like C. S. Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Through my undergraduate years and into my graduate education my view of existence and the knowledge of it has changed and continues to evolve. However, I still maintain postpositivist underpinnings, though with a far greater appreciation of the role that perspective and bias play in an individual's understanding, including my own. Fundamentally, while I still believe that a single reality exists, I believe that because of their own personal histories and individual paths of development, people will almost certainly understand that reality quite differently. In that sense I recognize the contributions that a constructivist framework provides (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), since certain aspects of reality are social constructions and I think, at least on an operational level, most people function in a constructivist frame. This is seen in widely used terminology such as "my truth."

While I do not subscribe to such a view of reality at the macroscopic level, instead believing that truth is a singular thing, though individuals' understandings of and beliefs about that truth will vary, I recognize that many people understand life from either a philosophically or at least functionally constructivist frame and see that as essential to research that involves them. The function of and challenge for people in general, but especially for researchers is to try to and more accurately comprehend that reality. Because of the experiences and biases I have identified above, I am not able to do that perfectly. However, through interaction with others and the dialogue that results, I believe that we can create procedures and conduct research that give us a better understanding of the world as well as how it and the people who inhabit it function. That to me is the purpose of research and why I am interested in studies like this one.

Methodology

This study of how peer mentors assisted first-year students with their transition to college was a qualitative case study of peer mentoring clusters within a mentoring program for first-year students at Southwest Regional State University (SRSU). This approach to the study incorporated multiple forms of data collection and allowed for the consideration of the context in which these particular mentors assisted their mentees (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). This included not only the mentoring program in which the students participate but also the campus where the students were enrolled. These constituted the environment in which the cases were situated. After I collected multiple forms of data, detailed below, I analyzed them to look for themes and patterns that provided insight into how peer mentoring helped new students transition to college. In this section, I will, in turn, explain the choice of methodology, define what constituted a case, lay out the way in which cases and participants were selected, as well as explain the ways in which data were collected and ultimately analyzed.

Case Study Methodology

Trying to understand complex phenomena or processes, like what takes place in a mentoring relationship, can most successfully be accomplished through a case study since this approach addresses how and why types of questions (Yin, 2018). This method permitted me to apprehend the ways in which an assortment of factors interacted as part of the overall mentoring process (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). As such this study was conducted utilizing the case study method, which according to Stake (1995) is the study of a clearly defined and bounded system. The case study method also encompassed a

wide variety of data sources which can enable the researcher and participants to gain a more holistic understanding of the relationships in question (Yin, 2018).

Multiple Case Study

This study was a multiple case study where more than one case was used to illustrate the issue under consideration (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This approach included the study of multiple peer mentoring clusters within the same overall programmatic setting allowing for the "aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class" (Stake, 1995, p. 74). This approach did not require identifying a particular unusual, critical, or revelatory case upon which to base the study (Yin, 2018). Using the multiple case study approach to examine peer mentoring enabled me to consider patterns and correspondences that I discerned when holding up individual cases for comparison and contrast (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Stake, 1995).

The design for this multiple case study was also both instrumental and embedded. It was instrumental in that studying these specific peer mentoring clusters was the means by which I sought to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of peer mentoring in general. The mentoring clusters were not the primary interest in and of themselves, but rather a mechanism to better understand the ways in which peer mentoring can lead to improved student transitions into higher education. (Stake, 1995). The study was embedded as all the cases selected were drawn from one specific university-sponsored mentoring program at SRSU. That program was the milieu within which all these peer mentors were recruited and paired with first-year mentees. The program provided their training and the guidelines within which the mentors operated. To have ignored that context and the way in which the selected cases were embedded in it would have

neglected consideration of the impact that the larger program had on the peer mentors who were being studied.

Case Selection

Having established the general design of the study, it remains for me to discuss the process by which certain cases were selected for inclusion in the study. This section explains what constituted a case, the criterion by which I selected cases, and the process by which that selection took place. This study included four distinct cases.

Mentoring clusters as the cases. The cases for this study were peer mentor mentoring clusters at Southwest Regional State University (SRSU), a four-year, public institution that enrolls approximately 14,000 students. Each peer mentoring cluster was comprised of one peer mentor and one or two mentees associated with that particular mentor. The peer mentor worked with all the individual mentees in their cluster, but the mentees did not necessarily have any relationship with one another. It is because the mentees do not necessarily have any relationship with one another that I have chosen the term cluster as opposed to group which might suggest such as connection. I am coining this terminology of a mentoring cluster because there is a lack of terminology in the existing mentoring literature where the pair or dyad is the traditional mentoring structure (Crisp & Curz, 2009; Darwin & Palmer, 2009). The peer mentoring clusters were part of a formal, university-sponsored mentoring program. That program employed between 20 and 25 paid mentors, most of whom had completed at least one year at the institution. The program assigned those peer mentors to multiple new, first-year students.

There were several reasons that I chose to conduct this study with these mentors. First, these mentors worked with first-year students, the focus of this study. As such these

mentors and their mentees were ideally situated to provide information on the phenomena of how mentors help first-year students transition to college. In addition, the fact that three of the four mentors had multiple mentees who participated in the study allowed for aggregating varied mentee perspectives for those cases. Being able to solicit insights from different mentees partnered with the same mentor provided data triangulation, as will be discussed later, but also helped to mitigate confounding factors in understanding the ways in which a mentor aided a particular mentee. It also provided the opportunity to consider whether the mentor used different tactics or approaches in working with different mentees. Finally, the choice of these mentors as cases provided the opportunity to observe interactions between the mentors and their mentees as will be detailed below. This permitted me to rely not just on self-reporting from interviews, but to look for ways in which the mentors aided the transition process that participants might not have recognized, remembered, or deemed worthy of mentioning in an interview.

Criteria, Intensity, and Purposeful Sampling to Identify Cases. For this project, I initially planned to study at least 3 different peer mentoring clusters. I ended up electing to include four. This maintained a manageable number of participants while allowing for various forms of diversity within the cases. To facilitate the selection process, I utilized mixed sampling methods to choose which clusters were selected as cases (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). The selection process for choosing the peer mentoring clusters started with criteria sampling which set specific requirements that potential participants had to meet to be included (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). To be included as a case in this study a cluster had to have a peer mentor and first-year students within the mentoring program. In addition, the cluster's mentor had to be willing to take part in the

interviews and observations. Lastly, each peer mentoring cluster also had to have a minimum of one but preferably two mentees who were also willing to participate in the study. I had originally intended to include only clusters with at least two mentees, but in order to preserve greater diversity within my case selection I decided to include a mentor who only had one mentee who had agreed to take part. I only considered cases meeting all these requirements for inclusion in the study. I chose not to include a fifth case because the mentor in that cluster did not have any mentees who followed through on their intention to participate and I would only have been able to collect data from interviewing the mentor.

In choosing among the cases that met the selection criteria, I used intensity sampling which is about finding information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon being studied (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). For this study intensity was related to how much mentors had helped first-year students who had experienced considerable amounts of change as they started college with their transition to higher education. I made this assessment using the Likert scale responses from both the mentor and mentees questionnaires detailed later in this chapter. I also used purposeful sampling to try and make sure that the cases were demographically diverse. This meant trying to avoid having all mentors and mentees of the same sex or race/ethnicity. In the course of selection, I was also able to choose cases that were diverse in relation to the amount of experience mentors had in their job, though this was not something I had originally considered.

Process for Identifying and Selecting Cases. In order to identify the cases that were a part of the study I created two questionnaires, one which was distributed to the

program's mentors and the other to the mentees. These questionnaires are included in

Appendixes A and B respectively. The questionnaire for the mentees collected some

basic demographic information as well as assessing how much they thought their mentor

had helped with their transition to college, how much transition they had undergone

starting college, and the student's willingness to participate in the interview and

observations portions of the study. I utilized a simple five-point Likert scale for the

questions about the helpfulness of the mentor and how much transition the first-year

students had experienced starting college. I entered the questionnaire into Qualtrics and a

link was distributed by text and email to all first-year students at SRSU. The online

Qualtrics questionnaire presented respondents with the Informed Consent Information

and recorded their acceptance or refusal of it. To encourage first-year student responses, I

offered a chance to win one of five $5 gift cards for mentees who completed this short

instrument. I also sought to increase student response rates with chain or network

sampling by asking the mentors to encourage their mentees to complete the survey

(Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Winners were chosen randomly from among those who completed the survey and

sent their gift cards from Amazon.com using that site's distribution system. A second

questionnaire (Appendix B) assessing the mentors' willingness to participate was also

distributed. Based on information from the program director I determined that

compensation was not necessary to induce mentor participation in the survey portion of

the study. Since all the mentors did not complete the survey as anticipated, in retrospect a

raffle might have helped with this group as well.

After students completed the questionnaires, I averaged scores regarding how much assistance mentees indicated each mentor had provided in the students' transitions to college. I then evaluated the potential cases with the highest average scores based on the established criteria. This meant that first those with the highest scores were crosschecked against questionnaire results indicating willingness to participate as well as the willingness of their mentees to participate. The mentors with the highest scores who were willing to participate and who also had mentees willing to participate were compared demographically. Given lower than originally anticipated response rates with the survey I began the interview process with five potential cases that presented as more data-rich than others, but then paired that down to four when none of the mentees in one cluster followed up on scheduling interviews. I also proceeded with one of the cases which only had one mentee to preserve some racial diversity among the mentors.

Data Selection and Collection

In this section, I will provide an overview of the types of data that I incorporated in this study as well as the means by which they were collected. I will then expound on each step in the data collection and selection process. While I am referring to these as steps and there was a general chronological flow to them, that does not indicate that steps were wholly sequential and does not preclude the possibility that they may have overlapped, which they in fact did. For example, new artifacts such as new social media posts became available while interviews were ongoing. This section does, however, portray the general flow of the data-gathering process that I followed.

For this study I utilized several types of data from multiple sources, a standard approach in case study research (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). While qualitative inquiry might

most commonly be associated with interviews and accompanying transcripts as a source

of data (Merriam & Tindell, 2016), there are actually a variety of data sources that an

investigator may use to gain an understanding of the cases being examined (Yin, 2018). I

employed multiple forms and sources of data for several reasons. First, this provided a

much fuller or more in-depth comprehension of the cases. As Creswell and Creswell

(2018) noted, the use of multiple types of data in a case study is necessary as "relying on

one source of data is typically not enough to develop this in-depth understanding" (p. 97).

Second, I believe the use of multiple data forms and sources helped me achieve data

saturation, a point when no new information is being found, as well as aided me in

identifying when it had been reached (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdel,

2016.) Finally, utilizing different varieties and sources of data allowed for comparison as

well as triangulation. For example, by comparing the experiences of different mentees

with the same mentor, I was able to look for ways in which mentors tailored the ways in

which they aided individual first-year students based on the mentees' differing situations,

personalities, etc. I also expected it would be helpful to see if mentors helped their

mentees in ways they do not report in interviews. Triangulation, as will be discussed later

supported the trustworthiness and credibility of this study's findings.

Given the nature of this multiple case study, I collected data by five different

means: documents, physical/digital artifacts, questionaries, direct observations, and

interviews. Table 3.1, below, provides a breakdown of the different data sources along

with the type of information initially expected, additional rationale for including that data

source and type, as well as the ways in which I anticipated that the information from that

particular source would to connect to Schlossberg's (Anderson at., 2021) Transition

Framework.

 The initial step in data selection and collection was securing documents and

artifacts from the institution's mentoring program. Even though the program was not the

focus of this study, I believe these data increased my understanding of ways in which the

mentors were trained and expected to support the mentees as they transition to college.

They also provided information on ways in which first-years students were told they

could expect support from their assigned peer mentor. From my communication with the

director of the mentoring program I had learned that they have training manuals, lists of

mentor expectations, as well as various emails, social media posts, etc. that communicate

information about mentoring and its importance to both the mentors and first-year

students.

Table 3.1

Data Collection Matrix

Data source	Types of data expected and other rationales for inclusion	Anticipated connections to Schlossberg's Transition Framework
Documents and Artifacts	• Means by which mentors are expected to provide support. • Forms of campus support with which mentors can connect mentees. • Coping Strategies	• Self • Support

Data source	Types of data expected and other rationales for inclusion	Anticipated connections to Schlossberg's Transition Framework
Mentor training	• Information on the general student population • Means by which mentors provide support. • Forms of campus support with which mentors can connect mentees. • Coping Strategies • Meet and begin to establish rapport with mentors	• Self • Support
Questionnaires	• Demographic information • Amount of transition reported • Determining whether individuals meet the case criteria	• Situation • Self
Interviews with mentors	• Types of transitions the mentees are facing • Ways mentors are helping mentees understand changes	• Approaching Transitions
Interviews with mentees	• Types of transitions being experienced • How they are addressing the changes • Ways the mentors are directly aiding them • Forms of indirect support including connecting with or recommending resources	• Approaching Transitions • Situation • Self • Support • Coping Strategies
Observation of mentoring session	• How mentees understand their college transition • Types of support provided or identified • Coping strategies identified or suggested	• Approaching Transitions • Situation • Self • Support • Coping Strategies

The next step in the data collection process was to observe some of the training sessions for the mentors. This took place before the start of the fall semester and served several purposes. First, as with the documents above, as I anticipated the training would provide insight into specific ways the mentors were expected to aid the first-year students. This included training on how they should use materials like their peer mentoring binder and interact with their mentees. Secondly, based on information from

the program director, I also anticipated that I would learn some general information about the situation of the general student population and SRSU. This was addressed in the training and provided me with context when interacting with the participants as I picked up terminology and campus details specific to SRSU. Finally, it was an opportunity to meet and establish rapport with the mentors. While this did not seem to translate into the level of mentor completion of the initial survey I had hoped for, it did seem to aid in the interview portions of the study when I was visiting with the mentors and observing their meetings with their mentees. In these settings, I was able to refer to their training and they remembered having met me during that time which seemed helpful at the start of the interviews.

Next, I digitally distributed and collected the questionnaires. While the primary purpose of these instruments was to facilitate case selection, they also had some probative value in understanding the mentors and mentees in each case as well. The questionnaires included items on demographic information that corresponded to aspects of the Self portion of the framework.

The next portion of the data collection process was the mentor and mentee interviews (Saldaña, 2011). I prepared separate interview protocols (Appendixes E through H) for the mentors and the mentees composed of prepared, broad, open-ended, topical questions (Seidman, 2019; Stake 1995). These would be classified as semi-structured interviews. I planned to conduct two interviews with each mentor and mentee around the six- and ten-week marks of the semester in a chiastic structure with mentor interviews coming first and last and the two interviews of each mentee sandwiched in between. This timetable turned out to be overly optimistic and it took most of the

academic year to complete the process of a first round of interviews, schedule a time for observations, and then complete the second round of interviews. Mentors and mentees scheduled their interviews using a Calendy link sent to them by email and/or text.

All interviews were conducted one-on-one either in person, over Zoom, or using Google Voice. Zoom was the preferred option, but I adapted as needed to accommodate individual mentors and mentees. This one-on-one interview structure was designed to allow for greater candor on the part of the participants and avoid bias introduced by participants answering based on how the person with whom they were paired might perceive or react to what they shared. One interview was conducted in person at the request of the participant. Due to connection issues with Zoom, I had to switch one interview to Google Voice. The interview conducted in person was recorded with two devices for backup purposes in case of device failure, in order to more accurately preserve what is said (Yin, 2018). Interviews conducted on Zoom were recorded using the platform's built-in recording functionality as well as using an audio recording device for backup. For the Google Voice interview, I used two audio recording devices. I also took some handwritten or typed notes during each interview. Additionally, I completed memos after the interviews to capture my impressions and observations related to the participants during the interview as well as my reflections and reactions related to how the overall interview itself went. Finally, I utilized the VidGrid transcription service made available through UNL to get transcripts of the recordings. I checked and corrected the transcripts that the VidGrid service generated.

The interviews were central to the case study as they encompassed the widest range and largest amount of data. I structured the interview protocols (Appendixes E

through H) to cover both the Approaching Transitions and taking stock of resources (4s)

portions of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework. By interviewing

both mentors and mentees I anticipated that I would hear different perspectives. For

example, I was able to note whether the mentors' and mentees' perceptions of the types of

support provided aligned. Likewise, I was able to look for situations where mentees may

have felt that the mentors were aiding them in ways the mentors themselves did not

recognize. Furthermore, by interviewing multiple mentees for each mentor I was able to

compare and contrast how each mentor helped different first-year students within the

mentoring cluster. I deliberately chose this approach rather than including more cases and

only interviewing one mentee with each case. I believe a deeper understanding of the four

selected cases proved more enlightening and trustworthy than a more limited view of

five, six, or more cases would have been.

The final type of data I chose to include was the observation of interactions

between mentors and mentees during one of their scheduled meetings. The first two of

these observations took place in person. Both were with the same mentor on the same

day. I sat apart but close enough that I could hear the mentor and mentee as they spoke. I

used a recording device and took notes as I observed these meetings. Logistical issues,

however, made additional in-person observations difficult as Creswell and Poth (2018)

noted can happen in qualitative studies. The unpredictable timeframe in which a mentee

might make or cancel a meeting when coupled with a travel time of close to three hours

provided a challenge. For example, on one occasion I was driving to SRSU for a

scheduled observation when I received notification that the mentee had canceled the

meeting. In addition, my perception, which I noted in my reflection immediately

following the observations, was that my presence at the meetings, even though I was out of the line of sight of the first-year students, had influenced the interaction between mentors and mentees. This led me to consider alternative approaches as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018).

After brainstorming and seeking advice, I set up a new system with the mentors where I was able to listen in on their meetings with mentees using Zoom. The participants had already agreed to allow recording of the mentoring sessions, this iteration merely changed the mechanism by which that took place. When one of their mentees participating in the study scheduled a meeting the mentor notified me, and I sent the mentor a Zoom link. Before their meeting with their mentee started, the mentor joined the Zoom call with audio only. I was then able to listen to the session remotely rather than being there in person. I used Zoom's built-in recording function as well as a backup device to capture the audio. I had this transcribed using VidGrid like the interviews and checked and corrected the transcripts that were generated. Both methods of observing these interactions allowed me to look for ways in which the mentors aided the first-year students which were not reported in the interviews and the rapport between the parties. In terms of timing, I conducted the observations between the two sets of interviews. This allowed me to include questions in the second interview about things I witnessed or perceived during my observation of the mentoring meetings.

Overall, I anticipated the data selection and collection process would last about three months but instead it took closer to nine. The general order of the data selection and collection process is presented visually in Table 3.2. This started with the collection of

documents and artifacts once the proposal had been approved and IRB endorsement was
secured. Data collection ended with the completion of the second round of interviews.

Table 3.2

General Order and Projected Timeline for Data Collection

Data type	Projected timeframe for selection and collection
Documents and Artifacts	Starts upon approval of the study, but will continue till the end of additional items are found
Observation of mentor training	Prior to the start of the semester
Mentor and mentee questionnaires	Week 4 of the semester
Observation of mentoring program events	During the semester exactly dates TBD
Interview 1 with mentors	Starting the 6th week of the semester
Interview 1 with mentees	Starting the 6th week of the semester, but after completion of the mentor interviews
Observation of mentoring session	Atter the completion of the first round of mentee interviews
Interview 2 with mentees	Starting the 10th week of the semester
Interview 2 with mentors	Starting the 10th week of the semester, but after completion of the second round of mentee interviews

Data Storage and Safety

Before beginning any actual data collection, it was important to have a plan for
would be done with them (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). As data were collected for this study,
I stored them in a single electronic database. This database served to organize and

catalogue the different types of data as they are collected (Yin, 2018). In addition, the database also established what Yin (2018) calls a "chain of evidence" that would enable someone to trace evidence from the point of collection through to the case findings. This database was stored securely using my Microsoft OneDrive account provided through the University of Nebraska. This system is not only encrypted but also requires two-factor authentication to gain access. Computers and other electronic devices that I used for the study were password and/or biometrically protected. These protections are a fundamental part of protecting the privacy of participants, a foundational responsibility in ethical research (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

Documents and Artifacts from the Mentoring Program

Documents and artifacts are common forms of data collected in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). Documents can include materials such as websites, handbooks, reports, and emails (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Artifacts are items that come from the everyday context of the case study environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and may include posters, social media posts, giveaway items, or items present at social events for the program. For this study, I collected multiple forms of data that fit within these categories.

I began the data collection process by procuring existing documents and artifacts from the institution's mentoring program. The director of the mentoring program had previously agreed to provide me access to these and sent them to me after the IRB process was completed. Based on previous conversations with her I requested specific items that I believed would show ways in which the mentors were expected or equipped by the program to help first-year students make the college transition. While the peer

mentoring program as a whole was not within the bounds of the cases as delineated above, those items helped elucidate both the structure and context within which the relationships between the peer mentors and mentees existed. In addition, they also provided insight into how the mentors were expected to relate to and support their mentees with their college transitions. The materials included worksheets and other activities that the mentors used with students. Some of these were utilized in the mentoring sessions I observed. Since many of these items were already in existence, it made sense that these were the initial forms of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Documents that I incorporated in my request for this study included but were not limited to, training manuals, mentor expectation descriptions, as well as existing program and mentor assessment information. Given this method of securing the items, I anticipated that I would have to sort out some items that were not germane to this study. I was looking specifically for documents that provide information about ways the mentors should be helping students in their college transition. I anticipated that the vast majority of documents collected would already be in digital form and that is how they were delivered. I also examined institutional web pages for information about SRSU generally and the mentoring program specifically. As I collected documents, I entered them into the case study database. Following Yin (2018) I noted key points connected to the research questions. I drew on these materials for some follow-up questions in my interviews with the mentors and mentees.

I collected additional documents and artifacts at the mentor training. In the case of physical items, I chose to record the artifacts as digital photographs or video clips rather than taking and later scanning them (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For example, I took pictures of handouts used at the training as well as PowerPoint slides shown. I was later able to procure a PDF export of all the training PowerPoint slides. In the case of the handouts, almost all were duplicates of the digital training materials I had already received.

Observations of Mentor Training

Another source of data for this study was the observation of the mentors and mentees. As this was the first type of observation to be included, I will first provide a general rationale for including this form of data in the study, which I believe is applicable to both types of observations, before delving into the specifics of observing mentor training.

While observations as a method of data collection are most commonly associated with ethnographic research, they are now used in a variety of qualitative inquiries (Bhattacharya, 2017). Observations were an important data source as they allowed me to see the mentors and mentees in a more natural environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observations can include things like the setting as well as the participants, including their conversations and interactions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observations provided the opportunity to witness ways in which the mentors interacted with and helped the first-year students which the mentors and mentees may not have thought to self-report in the interviews. They also afforded the opportunity to observe the ways in which the mentors related to their mentees. With this mentoring program, I had anticipated there would be at least three different opportunities to observe different aspects of the mentoring program and its participants in what Yin (2018) calls "the real world setting of the case" (p.121). In all three cases, I had planned to observe as a non-participant, allowing me to focus

more on recording my observations and reflections in the moment (Emerson et al., 2011).

I was only able to complete two types of interactions. I will now discuss the first instance

of observational data, mentor training, and address the other two later in this chapter.

The first type of observation I included in this study was mentor training. At the

beginning of the academic year, the mentors participated in a multi-day program designed

to prepare them for their roles. This training was led by the director of the mentoring

program. I did not, however, attend all the training. I reviewed the schedule with the

director and selected specific sessions that addressed: 1) means by which the mentors

were trained or expected to support students, 2) forms of campus support to which

mentors were expected to connect mentees, 3) strategies mentors were expected to utilize

with or train their mentees to use, or 4) information on the population of incoming first-

time students. I had previously secured permission to attend and observe this training.

Observing the training supplements instead of merely reading the training materials, I got

to witness and note any points of emphasis that may not have come through in textual

form as well as questions the mentors raised which elicited more detailed responses in the

course of the training sessions. These observations suggested avenues of inquiry that I

followed up on with the mentors and mentees in the interviews.

It also provided an opportunity to begin developing rapport with the mentors

(Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2019). In fact, while I had intended to be present solely as an

observer and did so most of the time, there were exercises in which the mentors and

SRSU staff invited me to participate. I did so and got to interact with several different

mentors. I also visited with different mentors during break times. On a couple of

occasions, the director even solicited my input during discussions due to my experience in Student Life.

Observing the training was important as it also provided a frame of reference by which to compare the mentors. While they all went through identical training, I expected that they would implement that training in different ways based on their own individuality as well as the distinctiveness of each of their respective mentees. Since Schlosberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) transition framework was founded with an assumption that no two transitions are alike, having their common training as a point of reference helped me discern ways in which mentors differentiated their implementation and approach on an individual basis. To help illustrate the point, one may think of a painting class where all students are given the same set of supplies, identical instructions, and even shown the same example picture. Inevitably, however, the painters produce different works of art because of differences in ability, preference, etc. Those differences and the individual decisions leading to them can better be understood by having observed the process. I envisioned overserving the mentor training in a similar manner.

While conducting the observations, I took field notes to keep a record of what I saw. They were structured using observation protocol 1 (see Appendix A). This protocol contained questions that guided what I was looking for and helped organize the data collected. While making observations I recorded what I saw and my initial reactions (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After completing the observations, I moved to a location where I could further note what stood out to me (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I included these observations and notes in my data analysis.

Questionnaires

While, as previously discussed, the primary function of the questionnaires was for case selection, they also provided a source for some data related to the Self portion of the transition model. The questionnaires (Appendixes B and C) were distributed electronically, by email and text, around the fourth week of the semester. The director had indicated they were willing to send those to the first-year students and mentors through their established communications channels and I chose to use this approach. The messages included a link to an online survey instrument in Qualtrics. Responses were collected using that instrument so that I could access and download the results online. Once I selected cases for the study and recruited the associated mentees, I collected the demographic data related to those specific persons included in the study (Yin, 2018).

I am including here a brief overview of some results from the survey sent out to first-year students to help elucidate the characteristics of the respondents that informed the case selection process. This provides some important insight regarding the pool from which I was able to select the peer mentoring clusters. First, the survey showed that 79% of first-year students who completed the survey had experienced a lot of change as they started college. Of those who answered that they had experienced a lot of change, half agreed and the other half strongly agreed with the statement. For the students who responded to the initial survey, change was an integral part of their college experience. This may have made them more open to working with a peer mentor.

In addition, when asked about the role of their peer mentor in helping them adjust to college life more than 66% of respondents indicated their peer mentor had been helpful in their college transition. Of this group, approximately 60% of them agreed with that

sentiment while the rest strongly agreed. Most of the remaining responses rated their peer

mentor's helpfulness as neutral, though two students did indicate that they disagreed with

the statement that their peer mentor had been helpful in their college transition. Overall,

almost all the students either rated their peer mentor as helpful or were at worst neutral in

their estimation of their peer mentor's utility in helping them transition to college life.

This limited the pool of students from which I could try to find participants to share

experiences where mentors were less helpful. Only one student in this category

responded to my request to schedule an interview. In the end that student did not connect

for their scheduled interview and did not respond to follow-up communications.

Observation of Mentoring Program Events

I had also planned to observe participants at events and activities specific to the

mentoring program. In earlier discussions, the director informed me that during the

period of this study, the mentors were planning to organize a series of weekly events on

campus for their mentees. I had thought the interactions at these events might show

behaviors or statements demonstrating that even in informal settings the mentors were

still providing types of support or offering mechanisms for coping with the college

transition that aligned with Schlosberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework.

Unfortunately, in practice, these events took place far less frequently than anticipated and

did not align with the times I was able to travel to SRSU. I was, therefore, not able to

include them. The Observational Protocol I had planned to use to structure this portion of

the data collection is still included in Appendix D.

Interviews with Mentors

I interviewed the mentors over Zoom as discussed above. Each interview was scheduled for approximately one hour in length. I recorded the interviews, took notes and memos, and created interview transcripts as previously described in the overview. The first round of interviews commenced about eight and a half weeks into the start of the fall semester, two and a half weeks later than originally planned. It took longer to collect adequate participation data from the questionnaires, recruit participants willing to be interviewed, and schedule those interviews. This did, however, allow time for the new students and their mentors to have several meetings before I interviewed them.

The interview questions focused on the ways in which the mentors helped new students understand their transition to college and the ways in which they provided support to those mentees during the transition process. I interviewed the mentors a second time after completing both interviews with their respective mentees. The second set of these interviews focused on topics that developed from my interviews with the mentees and observations of their interactions during their mentoring meetings. All interviews were transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

Interviews with Mentees

Similarly, once I selected them, I interviewed the mentees either in person or virtually using Zoom. I recorded the interviews as previously described. To select the mentees, the first-year students were invited to participate in the interview portion of the study based on responses in the previously discussed questionnaire. A willingness to participate, however, was only one precondition for selection. Additionally, I only included mentees associated with one of the selected mentors. Furthermore, in order to

select mentees who could provide rich information on the object of this study, I used the questionnaire responses to select mentees who reported considerable amounts of change starting college as well as their mentor's helpfulness to them in working through those changes. This again involved intensity sampling combined with purposeful sampling as I wanted individuals who could provide rich information about how mentors helped them with the changes they faced starting college, but also who to some degree, represented the diversity within the student body (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

I drew the information to help determine intensity from the Likert scale items on the questionnaire. I used the demographic information from the questionnaire results to try and achieve diversity among the mentees chosen for interviews. Once a mentee was selected, I contacted them and corroborated their willingness to allow me to interview them.

I planned to interview each of the mentees twice. Each interview with a first-year student was scheduled for about one hour in length, though when conducted they ranged from about half an hour to just over one hour. One first-year student only completed the first interview in the planned process. Questions focused on how they were transitioning to college and ways in which their peer mentors had helped them make sense of the changes they have faced as well as ways in which their mentors aided them through their transition to college life. Drawing on aspects of the first two parts of Seidman's (2019) structure for phenomenological interviewing, this first round of interviews included some time for getting to know the participants and their backgrounds as well as establishing rapport.

The second round of interviews was intended to follow approximately four weeks later, though this ended up spreading out over a couple of months. This provided the participants additional time to reflect on the transition process and new developments that had taken place in the intervening time. This second interview also allowed me to ask the first-year students about things I noted while observing their interactions with their mentors during the mentoring sessions I observed. Mentees who completed both interviews were compensated with a $15 gift card. The student who only completed the first interview received a $7.50 gift card.

Observation of Mentoring Sessions

Finally, I was able to select participants all of whom agreed to let me observe meetings between first-year students and their mentors. At the time the study was designed and proposed these meetings were taking both in person and virtually due to pandemic restrictions at SRSU. I was therefore initially prepared to conduct those observations in person or by overserving meetings on Zoom or Teams. At the time I actually conducted the study, however, SRSU had returned to more normal operations and mentoring meetings were being done only in person. As previously described, I started by trying to observe these meetings in person but shifted to listening in over Zoom while the mentors and mentees met in person. This meant that for the later observations, I lost the ability to see the space where they were meeting as well as interactions including things like body language. This did, however, seem less intrusive to the mentoring process and the first-year students in particular even forgot that I was listening in even though I had communicated with them about the change in procedure.

These observations enabled me to look for ways in which the mentors helped their freshmen mentees make sense of the transition to college, discussed ways to adapt to it, as well as offered or connected students to different forms of additional support. These observations informed how I followed up on the prepared questions for the second interview. I used Appendix I to organize my notes from these observations. As already discussed, I recorded record the mentoring session, while also jotting notes. The recordings were transcribed by the VidGrid service and then I checked and corrected them. After all data collection was complete and the information cataloged, the case study progressed to data analysis.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

In this section, I describe the way in which I analyzed the various forms of data collected and synthesized them into an understanding of how the peer mentors aided the transition of new students to college. Data analysis is about identifying from amongst all the bits of information collected those that are relevant to and that answer the research questions posed by the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). This part of the research process can be particularly challenging because as Yin (2018) notes, analysis is "one of the least developed aspects of doing case studies" (p. 164) with "few fixed formulas… to use as guides" (p. 164). This lack of a clearly defined process to follow was further exacerbated by the sheer quantity of data that was collected over the course of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). This substantial volume of data collected stemmed from the number of interviews conducted as well as the variety of other data types and sources I chose to employ.

To help manage the data, organize it, as well as facilitate the analysis, I used the Atlas Ti software program. Using such software, however, did not lessen my role or take my place as the researcher in doing the analysis. As Yin (2018) notes while qualitative software can assist and serve as a tool, the researcher remains the one doing the analysis. No program is able fully capable of making the analytical choices that I made as I examined the data, though at the time of writing new AI analysis features are being added to programs like Atlas. I make note of this because at the time I was doing data analysis beta versions of AI coding tools were available. I, however, made the decision not to use any of these, including the ones embedded in Atlas Ti, and did all the coding myself.

Parallel Collection, Coding, and Analysis

The data analysis process for this project utilized a concurrent approach as suggested by Miles et al. (2014). This approach recognizes that "there is no particular moment when data analysis begins" (Stake, 1995, p. 71). Data analysis is about making sense of what the researcher is hearing, seeing, or otherwise learning about the case and this is a process that is ongoing and constant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014; Stake, 1995). That is to say that I went back and forth between collecting data and beginning to analyze it once the first pieces of data were collected. For this reason, I used memos during the collection and coding process as noted earlier (Yin, 2018). The memos served to record impressions, thoughts, and connections that I noted throughout the data collection process. These memos like other types of data were coded as described below, though it should also be noted that the memos reflected the beginning of the coding process as they were expected to capture connections and summaries of that data that formed some of the codes and themes in the analysis process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014).

Data Coding and Analysis

Coding is about assigning a label to a section of data that describes or summarizes that piece of information thereby allowing easy comparison to or aggregation with other such pieces (Miles et al., 2014; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). For this project, I undertook multiple rounds of coding. I conducted the initial round of coding for each data source after collection rather than waiting until all of a particular data type had been collected. For example, when I procured any documents or artifacts, I began coding them at that point rather than waiting until I believed all such items had been collected. This allowed me to use the information gleaned to improve subsequent data collection. Likewise, once I conducted and transcribed an interview, I started the initial round of coding rather than waiting until all interviews were complete.

After completing coding sessions, I wrote memos to record my impressions as well as facilitate analytical thinking about the data (Maxwell, 2013). These memos also preserved a sort of record of my evolving understanding of the cases and how they related. I also completed memos during the coding and analysis process.

For the first round of coding, I used simultaneous, open coding. Open coding is about taking pieces of data of varying lengths and assigning a label that reflects the content of that data (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). Utilizing simultaneous coding in this process means recognizing and coding based on the fact that a particular section of a document, transcript, etc. may reflect more than one distinct idea or category simultaneously (Miles et al., 2014). I noted that sections of the data I collected often did in fact address different themes and I found that I regularly assigned two or more codes to a piece of data. This choice to utilize open coding ran contrary to the deductive approach

some researchers use where researchers start with a provisional list of codes developed prior to and apart from the coding process (Miles et al., 2014). It was in the second phase of coding that I began to move towards established categories as I began to aggregate the data.

The second phase of coding, sometimes called axial coding, is about creating larger groupings of categories, and aggregating them based on similarity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). This is about observing patterns that begin to emerge within the data. These can include themes, causes, relationships, and theoretical constructs (Miles et al., 2014). In the execution of this study this is the point at which I connected the theoretical framework to intersect the data analysis process. As I conducted this second phrase coding, I considered how the groupings that I had assigned aligned with Schlosberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework. Specifically, I considered how the data groupings correspond with the subpoints within the first two stages of that framework. For example, a mentor might encourage a mentee to work with a tutor for a class in which the mentee is struggling. This could be classified as a strategy that modifies the situation in the transition model. Alternatively, a mentee may be feeling alone. The mentor might introduce them to some people the mentor knows or make arrangements for the mentee to spend time with other first-year students. This could be classified as developing a network of friends in the relationship portion of support in the framework. These are just examples of how things the mentors might do could connect with the transition model in the coding process.

My intention was to complete a minimum of two rounds of coding and analysis for each type of data. I actually went through the data multiple times. Once I collected all

the different types of data, I began subsequent rounds of coding looking for themes across data types and sources. This was about refining which pieces of data fit together to the point they could become assertions or propositions about what the data were indicating (Miles et al., 2014). Part of this process included trying to identify data and themes that suggested alternate explanations that might not fit or in fact might contradict the established theoretical framework. This aspect of data analysis was integral to establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of the case study and the final report. I drew on these assertions and propositions to structure chapter four of this dissertation.

Cross-case Synthesis

Given that this was a multiple case study, in addition to analyzing the mentoring relationships at individual units I also conducted cross case synthesis to look for common themes across the different cases. As Yin (2018) noted this technique is only used in multiple case studies. In this stage of data analysis, I began looking for any patterns that were common across the cases. Since it required treating the individual cases as wholes, this could only be done once the within-case patterns had been noted in the above stages of data analysis (Yin, 2018). As such, while within case analysis ran concurrent with data collection, the cross-case portion of data analysis did not start until all interviews had been completed and all coding and within-case analysis had been finalized.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

While there are well established methods for demonstrating validity and reliability in quantitative analyses, a corresponding consensus does not yet exist among qualitative researchers with a variety of viewpoints, approaches, and even varying vocabulary (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Whittemore et al., 2001). While some authors still use the terms

validity and reliability carried over, though redefined, from quantitative methodologies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018) I prefer, in spite of my postpositivist perspective, the terms credibility and trustworthiness. Overall, these disparate approaches, regardless of the specific terminology utilized, are about identifying and working to alleviate different types of bias within the research process (Miles et al., 2014). These processes for mitigating bias demonstrate the overall quality of the study conducted and lend credence to the analyses and conclusions included in the final report (Whittemore et al, 2001).

Such considerations cannot be ignored, because in qualitative inquiry the researcher is the primary instrument for both data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is compounded by the fact that in many, if not most cases, the researcher, as was the case for this study, conducts the primary analysis alone. This leaves one person "defining the problem, doing the sampling, designing the instruments, collecting the information…interpreting it, and writing it up. A vertical monopoly" (Miles, et al., 2014, p. 294). This understandably raises the obvious question of how much the researcher's accuracy can be trusted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). In order to establish credibility, accuracy in the interpretation of the data (Carboni, 1995 as summarized in Whittemore et al., 2001; Eisner, 1991 from Creswell & Poth 2018), and trustworthiness, transparent and ethical conduct of the study (Cresswell & Poth, 2018), this study utilized a variety of established and recognized techniques. These different practices were utilized to address different types of bias or other weaknesses that undermine the believably (Miles et al, 2014) of this study.

First, the issues of credibility and trustworthiness were addressed by examining possible researcher effects on the participants and data (Miles et al., 2014). This was done first through addressing researcher positionality, which has already been incorporated into this dissertation. Included in this were discussions not only of philosophical assumptions which I conveyed to the study but also my relationship to the site selected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, I tried to select, implement, and when required adapt data collection methods that were thorough, but as unobtrusive as possible while also being clear with all participants about the reasons for and goals of this study. (Miles et al, 2014).

Triangulation. The next method that I used to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the study was triangulation. This technique is a widely regarded way of checking data and conclusions by drawing from data collected in different ways (Miles et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). Miles et al. (2014) noted that there are actually different forms of triangulation, and this proposed study is designed to implement a few of those. By incorporating both mentees and their peer mentors the study utilized triangulation by data source. The inclusion of observations, documents, and artifacts also provided triangulation based on data type. The observations were particularly helpful in allowing me to check what mentors and mentees reported about their meetings with what I noted when I listened. Finally, the use of Schlossberg's theory (Anderson et al., 2021) provided theoretical triangulation.

Member Checks. In addition, I also implemented participant feedback, also known as member checking, in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After coding and condensing the data into themes, I sent participants a copy of the within-case findings for

their mentoring cluster and asked them to review the results of the analysis I had

conducted. In order to prevent them identifying fellow first-year students in their

mentoring cluster I removed the participant descriptions. This allowed the study

participants the opportunity to provide feedback as to whether they agreed that the

emergent themes I identified in the data and accurately represented or summarized their

reported experiences. Two participants responded with feedback to the emails I sent.

Pamela replied that what I had sent her saying that it "sounds excellent!" Peter reported

that he was "excited" about what I emailed him and said, "This is great." I did not receive

feedback from any of the other participants. As a result, I did not make any changes

based on the member check process.

Limitations

As with any study, there were limitations associated with the design and

implementation of this study on how peer mentors aided the transition of first-year

students. While I chose to try and incorporate multiple forms of data in order to get a

deeper and richer understanding of the cases, I relied heavily on interviews as the core of

the data collection process. Given that choice, the study was subject to limitations based

on the degree to which the mentors and their mentees were willing and able to share

information. Participants may have forgotten things that could have been useful to this

study during the interviews or for reasons of trust or discomfort, they may not have

chosen to share about parts of their mentoring and college transition experiences. I tried

to address these possibilities by including means to build trust and rapport, but this

remained a limitation of this study.

There were also limitations in the observational data portions of the study. Having an outside observer may have influenced the mentoring sessions as mentors and mentees may have been guarded in what they discussed. In addition, I felt at times that during the meetings I observed in person the mentor may have been doing certain things or doing them in a particular way because I was present. I found out later in the study that the director sat in on meetings as part of the mentor evaluation process and I have wondered whether the mentor associated my presence with that. I still believe valuable insight came from these observations, but the impact of an outside observer must still be acknowledged. The adaptation I made to listen in on meetings via Zoom likewise presented limitations. While I believe this approach lessened the influence on participants, it removed my ability to gather data about the meetings visually. Particularly in meetings where I knew the participants were moving around, I was aware of missing out on the ability to see them. While this was less of a concern for observing mentor training, my presence may still have had some impact that I do not recognize, cannot quantify, or cannot account for.

I was also limited by the fact that I was not a part of this institution and was therefore dependent on gatekeepers, such as the director of the mentoring program, for access. The staff with whom I spoke when I selected the site were supportive of the study and indicated they were willing to give me access to the wide range of data sources discussed in this chapter. My dependence on them for access as well as my lack of familiarity with the university, however, did limit this study. I might not have known to ask for certain things that could have been useful to the study. Additionally, I was not familiar with the campus culture or its students. This could have impacted the willingness

of mentors, or more likely, mentees to participate. This might have been critical as I was dependent on students agreeing to be interviewed and ideally observed for this study. All these concerns had the ability to limit the efficacy of this study.

A final limitation is that I was not able to interview any students who had not found their mentor to be helpful in their college transitions. In the initial surveys, I identified a first-year student within one of the selected mentoring clusters who indicated they had experienced high levels of change but had not found their peer mentor to be helpful. The student initially scheduled an interview but did not connect during the scheduled Zoom meeting and did not respond to further attempts at communication. Including a student like this could have provided a good contrast and informed the findings of this study.

Summary

This multiple case study sought to gain a better understanding of how peer mentors assist the college transition of first-year students. Utilizing multiple forms of data including documents, artifacts, observations, questionnaires, and interviews it integrated the experience and understanding of both the mentors as well as the mentees they are supposed to help. As data were collected, I began to code them looking for patterns and themes regarding how the mentors were able to aid the transition process the first-year students undertake. Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework served to structure and help make sense of those findings. After the data were analyzed, the results were reported in this dissertation.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand how peer mentors at Southwest Regional State University assisted first-year students as they transitioned to college. This multiple case study included four peer mentors and one or two of their associated peer mentees. Participants were chosen based on surveys sent to all new students at SRSU as well as to all the peer mentors working in the peer mentoring program. Based on the responses to those surveys I selected the four cases that constituted this study on peer mentoring. Each case was a mentoring cluster consisting of a peer mentor and one or two peer mentees. This chapter includes a discussion of the four mentoring clusters, background information on SRSU and its peer mentoring program, some of the common transitional challenges the participants identified for first-year students at SRSU, a summary of data from the survey sent to first-year students, the within-case findings (including a description of each peer mentor and their mentees), and finally cross-case analysis.

The within-case findings were based on analysis of simultaneous open coding of participant interviews, peer mentor meeting observations, and my notes and memos. I looked for common ideas within the different data sources and types for each case and grouped them together under a common theme. I used in vivo coding rather than established categories. For the cross-case analysis, I looked for themes that were common to one or more of the cases, the peer mentoring clusters. I completed all within-case analyses before starting to compare the cases. I grouped similar within-case themes together while also highlighting ways in which the mentoring approaches differed. All reported data have been deidentified in order to protect the privacy of the mentors and

first-year students who participated in this study. It was at the stage of cross-case analysis that I utilized Schlossberg's Transition Framework (Anderson et al., 2021) to organize and group my findings into larger themes. The ways in which peer mentors helped students make sense of their transition aligned with the first portion of the framework, Approaching Transitions. I grouped together the steps the mentors undertook to help first-year students cope with the changes they faced within the 4s structure.

Overview of the Mentoring Clusters

While I will discuss the participants in greater detail below, Table 4.1 provides some basic information on each of the mentoring clusters. The mentor and associated mentee(s) for each cluster are included. The table also indicates how long the mentor has served in that role, their classification, and the gender of each participant in the study.

Table. 4.1

Mentoring Clusters

	Mentor	Mentee	Mentee
Cluster 1	Jillian First year mentor Female Sophomore	Jeremy Male	Cassidy Female
Cluster 2	Carmen Second year mentor Female Junior	Natalie Female	---------
Cluster 3	Peter Second year mentor Male Junior	Alexander Male	Jennifer Female

Cluster 4	Carolyn	Paula	Pamela
	Second year mentor	Female	Female
	Female		
	Senior		

Background Information on SRSU and its Peer Mentoring Program

While this study focused on four individual mentors and their associated mentees with each of those clusters constituting a case, those mentoring clusters were still situated within a specific context that influenced how they functioned. This section provides some basic information about SRSU and its mentoring program for new students. In this overview, I have used round numbers and broad general information in an attempt to avoid making the location identifiable while still providing salient information about the institution where I conducted the study.

About Southwestern State Regional University

SRSU is a four-year public university that is part of the state higher education system in the Southwestern United States. SRSU is located in Cherry, which could be described as a college town where the institution and its students constitute a considerable portion of the overall population. IPEDS data classifies the town as remote meaning it is more than 35 miles from an urban center. SRSU offers a broad-based liberal arts education with both undergraduate and graduate degrees.

In terms of its student population, SRSU enrolls about twice as many women as men, with degree conferral skewing even more strongly towards females. The majority of students at SRSU are white, though there are significant groups of minority, especially Latinx, students. These demographic characteristics of the university were reflected in

survey responses and therefore also the makeup of the participant group for this study. Based on recent figures students at SRSU pay between $20,0000 to $25,000 per year on average putting it very near the mean cost to attend college in the state (Hanson, 2023). Many of the participants talked about financial aid and loans being important to their ability to attend college and this was a common topic of conversation between first-year students and their peer mentors.

SRSU Peer Mentoring Program

The peer mentoring program at SRSU is relatively new. While there had been some previous small-scale efforts, the university instituted the program two years prior to the start of this study using grant funding. The peer mentoring program was implemented to support all new students as they started SRSU, though this study only examined first-year students and did not include transfers. According to SRSU, the primary responsibilities of the peer mentors included offering academic support, connecting students socially, and providing information to students. The grant allowed SRSU to recruit, train, and pay students to serve as peer mentors. At the time of this study, the grant funding for the peer mentoring program had been extended an additional year as the institution considered funding options for the program further into the future.

The university mentoring program has employed approximately 20 peer mentors at any one time during its existence. As they described it to me, the recruiting and selection experiences of the peer mentors varied considerably. Carmen was already a student worker in the department housing the mentoring program and was directly recruited for the mentoring role by Andrea, the program Director. Both Jillian and Peter applied because of their experience with and encouragement from their own peer mentors

during their first years at SRSU. Carolyn was looking for a campus job and because of her experience with the orientation program at her previous college decided to apply. She shared:

> I really, really enjoy working with students and things like that, and promoting the sense of belonging around campus. So, I was looking for jobs at SRSU and saw peer mentoring…This is what I have been doing with orientation, but it seems like all year long, so this is really cool. And so, I applied and interviewed with Andrea, and got hired, and it's been honestly like one of the best jobs I could've ever had 'cause it's so cool to get to work with students all year round.

Because she transferred to SRSU after her first year, Carolyn did not have previous experience with the SRSU mentoring program. Carmen, despite attending SRSU her first year informed me that she did not meet with her peer mentor. She noted that because of the pandemic she was not engaged in campus life and said "I wasn't aware of it… I just wanted to stay home. I didn't go to classes in person." So, of the four mentors in this study only two of them actually met with their own assigned peer mentor during their first year at SRSU.

At the time I started this study only two of the peer mentors were men, an even greater underrepresentation than the overall student body, which as noted above was already predominantly female. In the middle of the year another male peer mentor was hired when one of the female peer mentors left her position because of the time requirements for her major. I did not get any clear sense of why fewer males served as peer mentors during the course of the study. The mentors selected for the study included one senior in her third year as a mentor; two juniors, both second-year mentors; and one

sophomore, a first-time mentor. This difference in the amount of experience each mentor had represented another form of diversity among the cases.

All new students are assigned to one of the peer mentors when they enter SRSU as part of their support system for starting college. Each year the Director of the mentoring program assigned the caseloads for the peer mentors and loaded them into a campus software program that mentors used to contact and track their interactions with students. Assignments were mostly random without regard for students' majors or personal demographic characteristics. The only exception to the use of random assignments I discovered was that in some cases classification, first-time student or transfer, was considered in the assignment process. A peer mentor who was a transfer student might be assigned a caseload of all transfer students, but the other peer mentors had mostly first-year students with a small number of transfer students as well. Each peer mentor was assigned around 200 students as part of their caseload. However, as became evident as I conducted the study, many students did not avail themselves of this form of support as they started at SRSU with less than half of students scheduling meetings, though this did vary from mentor to mentor.

The peer mentors worked up to 20 hours a week meeting with students through scheduled appointments and sending out emails and texts. The peer mentors sent out emails and texts at least two to four times a month. These communications included reminders to students that they could sign up for appointments, interactive questions designed to engage the students, and some campus announcements. Students scheduled meetings with their peer mentors through an online portal using links in the texts and emails the mentors sent. The structure of the meetings varied among the mentors though

all had certain elements in common. These included trying to ascertain how each student was doing, relaying information or reminding students about important upcoming events or deadlines, as well as answering questions and working to resolve issues raised by the first-year students.

Peer Mentor Training at SRSU

At the start of this study, I attended several of the training sessions that were provided for the peer mentors at the start of the academic year. This afforded me several important opportunities. First, I was able to meet and begin to establish some rapport with most of the mentors. This was limited as I was not able to meet all of them because some returning mentors were not present at the portions of the training I attended. Second, it enabled me to begin learning about SRSU's culture as well as terminology specific to the mentoring program. For example, they talked about the importance of blasts, text and email communications, that the mentors sent out to their assigned first-year students every other week. These, as will be discussed in detail below, turned out to play a significant role as a means of communication and access between first-year students and their peer mentors. I also got to see the peer mentoring binder which is composed of a number of activities and exercises the mentors can use with students to address specific areas of need. Finally, attending the training allowed me to understand some of the ways in which the peer mentors were expected to support their assigned students as well as the ways in which they were equipped to do so.

Common Transition Issues Facing First-Year Students at SRSU

While the literature review discussed in general many of the challenges students face as they start college, to further contextualize the effects of peer mentoring at SRSU

this section will identify some of the predominant college transition issues participants identified for new students at SRSU. The themes discussed here are drawn from the participant interviews and are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather to highlight common facets of the SRSU transition experience around the time of this study as discussed by peer mentors and first-year students. It is also important to remember, as discussed in the literature review, that these issues are not separate and distinct, but rather often overlap or interact with one another.

College Processes and Service

An initial area where participants consistently reported transition issues for first-year students was acclimating to SRSU-specific processes and systems as well as those of college life more generally. Navigating the SRSU website and related tech portals was a frequent difficulty for first-year students. Both peer mentors and first-year students spoke about how many students didn't know where or how online to check financial aid and scholarships, see their account balances, or register for classes. They also described how first-year students often struggled with the FAFSA renewal process.

In addition, participants shared that students commonly did not know about an array of campus offices and services or confused them with each other. To cite a common example closely tied to this study, members of the study talked about how first-year students regularly confused peer mentors with academic advisors. Even when students were aware of the difference, they did not know how to find and schedule an appointment with their advisor. Jillian spoke about how students often said things like "Oh, I don't know how to register" or "I have an email from my advisor. How do I set up an appointment?" Likewise, peer mentors and first-year students shared about student

ignorance of services like tutoring, supplemental instruction (SI), and counseling. For example, Carolyn spoke about this saying:

> Sometimes they don't even know that there's an SI session going on or they don't
>
> know about the different, like, math clinics or achievement centers on campus.
>
> Some of them are already going to SI's but maybe not to tutoring. And so, I tell
>
> them like, hey well tutoring's like more one-on-one.

On the whole, first-year students often found it difficult to know what they needed to do and who was part of that process or available to help them.

Study Habits and Skills

Another oft-discussed area of change for first-year students was how they studied or the need for new study skills because of the difference in college and high school classes. Carolyn indicated the importance of this issue noting, "a large amount of students who are on either academic warning or academic suspension" because they were not studying effectively for their classes. Several participants talked about how first-year students often discovered they had to spend considerably more time studying in college than they did in high school. Students who had been able in high school to "wing it," as Natalie put it, or "go for it and hope for the best," to use Pamela's description, found this was no longer adequate at SRSU. They spoke about the need for students to take and review class notes, find study spaces on campus rather than in their dorm room, or study tricks such as "the 50/10 method of setting a timer of studying for 50 minutes, 10-minute break, repeat" which Carolyn mentioned in my discussion with her. Furthermore, some noted this was an ongoing process with Jeremy, for example, sharing "I feel like some things worked last semester that I know for now, aren't working this semester. I don't

know what changed necessarily." Similarly, Paula noted that certain classes required different approaches to studying, some of which did not fit her preferred learning style. This need to study more effectively and use new approaches is an ongoing transition issue for SRSU students which was mentioned in some way by every participant.

Time Management

The differences in the way class schedules and studying are structured in college meant that large numbers of SRSU students struggled to organize their time effectively. Carmen noted, "That's one of the big ones… a lot of them have been telling me that they would like to improve their time-managing things." Natalie shared that students struggle with "balancing, kind of triaging what's most important." This is not surprising given that unlike high school where students are in classes back-to-back, in college students may have long breaks between classes. At SRSU participants also shared that students often take a mix of in-person and online classes, adding even more variables to new students' attempts to structure their time. In addition to a different structure and more responsibility for how they utilize their time, many first-year students encountered new or increased time demands in different aspects of their lives.

For example, related to what was discussed above, several noted that students at SRSU had to study considerably more than in high school. Natalie shared how "that was definitely an awakening" that requires adjustment on the part of new students. Furthermore, many students may have been getting a job for the first time or increasing the number of hours they spend at work in order to pay for college and related expenses. Carolyn spoke about "several students who are working close to full-time… so kinda managing all of that." Overall, between new, expanded, and in some cases the need to

reprioritize different aspects of their lives, first-year SRSU faced the challenge of learning to effectively utilize and balance the various demands on their time.

Work and Finances

Though the specifics might look different for various students, the interviewees regularly spoke about how paying for school and other living expenses, and therefore often getting a job to have money, were a challenging part of adjusting to college. First-year students and mentors spoke about first-year students they knew who had to work full-time or nearly full-time to earn the money they needed to pay for tuition, car notes, and food. In discussing the various demands on students' time, Carolyn noted "I have several students who are working close to full-time hours." Other first-year students were trying to get a job for the first time. As with many students around the country, many SRSU students were using loans to fund their college education.

Further complicating this at SRSU was the on-campus job market. Jillian mentioned in her meeting with Cassidy how there were often more students looking to work on campus than there were positions available. Even when students did get one of these coveted positions, this glut of workers meant they were not getting adequate hours. In her meeting with Peter Jennifer reflected on this problem telling him "I worked at Campus Pizza last semester, terrible. They cut my hours. Like right before I had to quit, it was four hours a week. That's not liveable." Jennifer was considering whether she would have to get a job off campus even though that would be far less convenient. Balancing the need to work with other time demands was another adjustment many first-year students had to navigate while adjusting to college life.

Relationships

As the first-year students started at SRSU they were also adjusting to different types of relational changes. Some of these changes centered on new relationships as first-year students sought to make new friends, learn to live with roommates, or understand how to interact with professors and college staff. Other changes were about managing new dynamics in previously existing relationships such as those with parents and old friends. All of these were part of trying to build a new or drastically modify an existing social support network amid the other alterations to their lives.

Social Life, Friends, and Classmates

Integrating into the social life of SRSU and making friends was another key challenge discussed by the study participants. While some students may have started SRSU knowing some other students, it seemed common based on my interactions with the students that large numbers arrived on campus knowing only one or even none of their classmates. Jeremy for example noted that when it came to social life starting college was "basically like starting over. That's a whole new like journey basically." While some students like Natalie found that "friends have just clicked into place" through relationships they developed in their dorms, Greek Life, or other organizations, others struggled to make those connections. Jillian noted that many new students "definitely have a hard time getting involved." The mentors spoke about how one of their focuses early on was to get students to attend campus events and meet people. Some shared about coaching students on how to meet new people and how they even encouraged their peer mentees to set goals in this area and report back on their progress at later meetings. Jeremy acknowledged that without such encouragement and

accountability, he was not sure he would have gotten connected to the social scene at SRSU. He shared "I didn't know anybody here and she [Jillian] set a goal we meet like five friends." Jillian later checked in with Jeremy to see if he had followed through on the agreed goal.

Beyond making friends, however, SRSU students also had to learn how to relate to other individuals in the college setting. Peer mentors shared about students asking for guidance about working in groups, dealing with interpersonal conflict, or how to interact with professors. Peter, for example, shared a common bit of guidance he gave to students telling them "You can email your professors, and most of 'em are really cool." Learning to make friends and navigate new interpersonal relationships was another area of life change first-year students at SRSU faced as they transitioned to college. Within that, living with other students could be particularly challenging.

Roommates and Suitemates

Learning to live with another person or group of people was a very common transition issue mentioned in relation to SRSU students. While students had the option to request with whom they would live, Jennifer noted that SRSU tended to assign roommates by common traits "like your majors and stuff" when students did not indicate specific preferences. Regardless of whether roommates were requested or assigned, interpersonal conflict, poor communication, and other problems were reported by students in the study. As an example of a more extreme situation, Peter spoke about a student who shared with him that her roommate "was bringing, you know, a bunch of alcohol in the room" and that student was "worried about herself getting in trouble" as a result of her roommate's actions.

Even when there is no conflict, poor or nonexistent communication or simple changes in rooming assignments can be unsettling or cause unexpected stress. Jennifer spoke about a situation where a suitemate leaving college initiated a chain of events that resulted in Jennifer's roommate moving into that room within the suite and Jennifer having a new roommate assigned without any advance notification. Even though it did not damage the long-term relationships between those involved, it was still disruptive and required Jennifer to acclimate to a new roommate in the midst of other ongoing college transition issues. Jennifer, speaking about what her roommate did concluded "I think it's fine now. It's like you didn't tell me but it's fine now. But [she] didn't tell me."

This was certainly not a problem for all students. Jillian stated that a common encouragement she gave to all students was to try "to bond with their roommates" because that would help them as they started college. Participants shared situations where roommates were helpful, and students assigned to live together grew to become friends. However, that does not change the fact that one peer mentor, Peter, identified roommate conflict as one of the topics about which students asked the most questions.

Professors

A final yet essential set of relationships that SRSU students had to learn to navigate were those with their professors, and this was a topic mentioned by several participants. Many students seemed unsure of what to expect from professors or how to relate to them. Participants noted that the age difference, expectations, position, and perceived access all contribute to student uncertainty about interacting with professors. Natalie provided some important insights into this saying:

> Not all professors are scary and mean. That's a big one, because I was definitely
> afraid to talk to a lot of my professors, but like I said, a lot of my professors, they
> were very helpful. They were very nice. They wanted you to go up to them.
> Where in high school all the high school teachers they teach you that your
> professors aren't going to care about you. They don't want you coming up to the
> things like that.

Pamela shared a less positive experience noting that due to the size of her class one professor "doesn't know all of our names, let alone who we are" and that compared to high school "my teachers are a lot less personable." Perhaps due to these realities, it is not surprising first-year students often seek help from their peer mentors on how to interact with their professors as they seek to work through this important relationship.

Within-Case Findings

This study included four peer mentors and one or two of each mentor's mentees in order to understand how peer mentors help first-year students transition to college life. I sent a survey to all new students at SRSU asking them how much change they had experienced as they started college and how much their peer mentor had helped them navigate those life changes. The survey filtered out new students who were transfers so it included only those who were first-year students in the selection process. By cross-referencing the responses of the first-year students and peer mentors, I selected data-rich cases while also trying to select a diverse group of participants. Each mentoring cluster consisted of a peer mentor and their associated mentees. I considered groupings where first-year students indicated that they had experienced considerable change as they started college and that their mentors had helped them navigate that change to be data-rich. The

participants agreed to take part in two interviews each and to allow me to observe one of their peer mentoring meetings. The order for the process was: 1) first mentor interview, 2) first mentee interview, 3) mentoring meeting observation, 4) second mentee interview, and 5) second mentor interview. I have used pseudonyms for all participants and deidentified other information to protect their identities.

Findings from Jillian's Mentoring Cluster

Jillian was a first-time peer mentor and a sophomore studying communications. She was a white woman from a small town in the state and attended a high school with fewer than 200 people in her graduating class. As a freshman, she participated in the peer mentoring program and found that it helped her in several areas of her own transition to college. As a result of that experience when Jillian's peer mentor, Rachel, brought up the prospect of being a peer mentor Jillian eagerly applied. Jillian shared that Rachel "just like helped me understand and like get ready for the classes" as she "pretty much answered any questions I needed and so I felt that I should, I wanted to do that for other students." Two of Jillian's first-year student mentees participated in the study.

The first of Jillian's mentees was Jeremy, a white man who grew up on a farm in another small town in the state, which he described as a "compact family or like football family community." He noted that he felt Cherry, where SRSU is located, despite being larger had a very similar feel to his hometown of Olive. In his survey responses, Jeremy indicated that he had experienced a considerable amount of change as part of his transition to college and strongly agreed that his peer mentor had been helpful in making that transition. Over the course of our discussions, Jeremy shared a number of different issues he had been dealing with as part of his transition to college. For example, he noted

that he was having to adapt in the classroom with "what kind of notes you need, like how to like really learn how to take notes to like better get the information. That's been pretty tough." At another point, he observed how difficult it was "being away from like friends and family you've known for the last 18 years of your life and now coming here when you don't know anybody."

The second mentee associated with Jillian was Cassidy, an Asian American woman studying psychology. She had originally planned to attend a community college but applied to SRSU and was surprised by how easy the process was overall, so she ended up enrolling. She joined a sorority during her first semester and talked about how she had really found a sense of community at SRSU. In her survey responses, she shared that she had agreed that she experienced a lot of change as she started college and that her peer mentor had been helpful in making that transition to college.

Walking Students to a Needed Resource

The first theme in Jillian's work as a peer mentor that I observed was how she linked students to various campus resources. With Jillian, however, I was struck how this went beyond simply providing information or even showing them where to find the information themselves or how to schedule an appointment. Jillian went further and personally walked students to campus resource locations to make sure the students made the connection. Cassidy shared some ways in which the provision of resources more often worked. Cassidy talked about how Jillian sent "emails every now and then just giving little resources for whether it's like help in tutoring or things going on around the campus that you can get involved in." At another point in our conversations, Cassidy noted that

Jillian "let us know about all of the tutoring and the resources of you know, whether it's

mental health and stuff like that." Jillian spoke about this as well when she said:

> I recommend tutoring. Like we, I offer tutoring like I'm like we offer tutoring in
>
> the Student Center or the library on the bottom floor. You'll go down the stairs to
>
> the bottom floor and then you'll take a right and it's right there. You'll see it, you'll
>
> see it, you'll see it like it's a big glass window. It says Tutoring. So, it says the
>
> Tutoring Center.

Jillian was intentional about letting her mentees know about available resources that help

them with various aspects of their college experience.

However, in my conversations with Jillian and Jeremy it became clear that while

this simple provision of information and encouragement for first-year students to avail

themselves of the campus support service was more common, it was not Jillian's only

approach. Jeremy, it turned out, had experienced a variation on this where Jillian

sometimes walked students to a campus office to make an in-person introduction and

helped them set an appointment. He shared that "Jillian walked me down there and was

like, 'Here, this is gonna help you.'" When I asked Jillian about why she did this she

shared, "Just so they don't feel, so they kind of just don't feel scared to just walk over

there by themselves. I know it's five feet away, but it just gives them some comfort I feel

like." These types of connections can prove invaluable to students even if they may not

recognize it at the time. Speaking to this, Jeremey reported that he "probably wouldn't

have passed anatomy without tutoring, and I didn't know that was a thing." He became

aware of it because Jillian took the time to go with him to the tutoring center. These

types of interactions built trust between mentors and mentees so that the first-year

students felt their peer mentors was able to help them make links they needed in college. Cassidy spoke about how she "would definitely feel more comfortable going to Jillian… because I know that she would have answers for me and that she would be able to provide me with those resources if I ever need any."

Getting Students Involved in Social Life

In her first meeting with Cassidy, Jillian made sure Cassidy was meeting people and making friends on campus. In that case, Cassidy had already started making connections by joining a Christian sorority. That was something, however, that Jillian followed up on later. In my observation of them, Jillian spent time checking to make sure things were going well with Cassidy's sorority as well as with a campus business organization that Cassidy had joined. While this was always a priority for Cassidy and something that she did relatively quickly and without the need for much support, Jillian still made sure Cassidy was transitioning to that part of college life successfully.

Jeremy's experience, however, was different and Jillian took a much more active role in helping him get involved in campus life. Jeremy did not immediately find a group or set of friends with whom he connected. Jillian, therefore, went about addressing this in a couple of ways. First, Jeremy spoke about how Jillian helped him look at "hundreds of groups that you can join like clubs and stuff" and noted that he "would've never known that like all those clubs and stuff are just sitting there at your fingertips if she hadn't said anything." In addition, Jeremy shared how Jillian challenged him to make connections with new people. They agreed on a goal where he would meet three new individuals and they would later follow up on that. Jeremy shared, "So, it kind of was like, oh okay, I need to go find actual friends." He continued by sharing that of those three people he met

as part of that goal he was friends with "Two of them still to this day. So she was that driving force behind, yeah… I probably wouldn't have met them [other new students] without Jillian."

In addition, Jillian also encouraged her peer mentees to become involved in the traditions on the SRSU campus. This seems to be an important aspect of the college experience for her, and she wanted her first-year students to experience that as well. In my discussions with Jillian, she spoke at length about SRSU traditions like Homecoming and the Spirit Squad. Both of her mentees noted how she passed on information about things taking place on the SRSU campus. Cassidy shared that "if there's a big event going on, you know, she'll kinda put a note or reminder of that and what her favorite things to do are, which definitely helps." Jeremy remarked that in addition to sharing about events, Jillian also tried to tailor her advice based on student's interests. He talked about how Jillian had:

> Always been willing to like tell you about events and like she'll tell you whether
> or not like an event is like worth going to. Like some of the stuff she's like, yeah,
> go to this event. It's like a total like awesome experience, you need to go to it.

Cassidy, despite her ease with making connections and getting involved, was still appreciative of as well as pleasantly surprised by the information Jillian shared. Cassidy noted:

> I don't think I expected them to help out like with resources when it came to just
> like connections and things like that, like non-academically, so outside of
> academics and school, you know and work. So that was definitely something that

I was pleasantly surprised with, just kinda seeing that they're available to help in

all areas.

In these different ways, Jillian emphasized the importance of and supported students'

efforts to make social connections as part of their college transition.

Providing a Place for Students to Rant

Another way in which Jillian supported the transition of her mentees was by

giving them a place where they could speak openly or, as she described it, "rant" if they

so needed. She shared that "They just like sit there and I just listen. I don't speak. I don't,

I just listen." Jillian also noted that sometimes students need a considerable period of

time saying **"**If they just need a 20-minute rant session, I let them talk for 20 minutes and

because I'm like, I'm no counselor but I can help you the best I can." Jeremy noted this

about Jillian as he remarked how she is "just good to talk to. Like, if you have anything,

she's like a good person, just to, like, listen I guess." He noted that because of her

willingness to listen and the trust he has developed with her "I feel like I just got really

comfortable and that relaxed. Like, I feel like I can always tell her." In her peer

mentoring role Jillian provided a safe outlet for first-year students to share things that

might not require the services of a mental health professional, but that students need to be

able to discuss with someone they trust.

Trying to Make a Personal Connection

Another key aspect of Jillian's approach to peer mentoring was developing a

personal connection with the first-year students with whom she met. Beyond just

providing a safe place for them to share, she worked to develop a relationship with the

students where she knew about their lives and shared with them from her own. Jillian

spoke to this in her relationship with Cassidy, while also noting that this varied based on the first-year student with whom she was working at the time:

> We kind of bounce off of each other. Like we'll just sit there and we'll talk about random things. And so, like there's like the ones that also I have like they have ran, I have talked with them around random things, but it just depends on the mentee.

Jeremy shared a similar experience from meeting with Jillian:

> We go back and forth. She'll tell me about stuff she's doing. She'll even tell me like stuff she's doing personally and stuff and then I'll tell her what I'm doing this weekend and stuff and we just kind of go back and forth.

In addition, Jeremy shared part of the importance of this when he reflected that these times of undirected conversation allowed space for him to remember problems, issues, or questions that he might be dealing with. He remarked:

> Some of that best stuff comes up is like those days where I don't really have, I don't think I have a purpose for going and then we'd go and we start talking about our day, like, our last month or whatever and then that's when some of the bigger stuff that actually affects me comes out, is when I don't actually go in with something.

This openness and sharing back and forth was something that I observed in the peer mentor meetings for both Cassidy and Jeremy. Similarly, Cassidy spoke about how this approach "definitely… builds a foundation of like trust and being able to know that you can go to that person if you need anything."

I did, however, note in my memos at the time that Jillian seemed to speak quite a bit about herself and things going on in her own life at times, perhaps even to the point of not attending adequately to the needs of the first-year students. In my observations, this particularly struck me in relation to Jillian finding out that she was going to have the opportunity to purchase Taylor Swift tickets. This was something that she brought up with both her peer mentees at the time. In her session with Cassidy especially Jillian seemed to spend a considerable amount of time on the topic, as she found out about the tickets from a text in the middle of their meeting. In my second interview with Cassidy, I did learn, however, that they had talked about Taylor Swift previously, and Jillian was aware that Cassidy was also a big fan making this an important point of connection for them. She expressed that she was not bothered by that conversation during their meeting. Jillian did share in our second interview, however, that she had received some feedback during her evaluation encouraging her to make sure she was focusing on the students even while sharing from her own life. Given that this was Jillian's first year as a peer mentor, it makes sense this might be, as she also acknowledged, an area of professional growth.

Showing Them What to Do

While mentoring first-year students Jillian also invested considerable time in showing students how to do a variety of things that helped them adapt to life at SRSU. Many of these related to mundane, but essential, college tasks. At other times she guided them through skill development that supported their successful transition to college. In speaking about a common example of this Jillian shared:

They say, "Oh, I have an email from my advisor. How do I set up an

appointment?" So, I tell them, there's this link that you do when you click my

appointments, like to make an appointment with me. There's the link that says

make an appointment with your advisor and you click the link and then you do it.

And then I show 'em how to do it and I show 'em what to fill out on the side.

She continued at another point in the conversation:

It basically just depends on what it is. Like if it's advising, I show them how to

make an advising appointment because with SRSU you have to meet with your

advisor or a[n] advisor before you are able to register for classes.

I was able to witness a couple of concrete examples of Jillian demonstrating how to

complete these important tasks in my observations of her meetings with first-year

students.

While meeting with Jeremy, Jillian showed him on apps and websites where to

find class scheduling information and his dining hall meal balances. Likewise, when

Cassidy had questions about her SRSU bill and account, Jillian not only talked her

through the key points, but they actually got online together, and Jillian showed Cassidy

where and how to check her refund status. Cassidy also shared that Jillian did something

similar helping her work on so-called SMART goals. SMART is an acronym for

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Cassidy remarked, "There

was a worksheet and everything. So, she [Jillian] talked me through it." Cassidy

continued that as they worked through the activity Jillian directed her step by step and

she learned "when you break it down into smaller pieces it helps you get move towards

that goal better and kind of see a little bit more clear as to where you're going to

accomplish that goal. Jeremy reinforced this idea when he shared how "I've had like just random questions about like college and things at SRSU… and she'd be like more than willing to like come and like schedule a meeting to like come help, like walk us through."

Sharing Information Based on Her Experience

A final theme that emerged from the data on Jillian's work as a peer mentor was her use of personal experience to aid and guide the new students. This was often passed on to the first- year students as advice or information about how to handle situations. Speaking to the importance of this Cassidy shared:

And so, she [Jillian] has that experience. So, she is able to give me that advice and it is reliable because I know that she's already experienced it and gone through it. So, she's able to you know, let me know what college is like and what that transition is and how that, how she can help me... I definitely think in the sense that she has been through you know, multiple years before me, it helps with being more trusting on her advice and knowing that you know, she's more knowledgeable with the college experience and knows what she's talking about in the advice that she's giving.

In my conversations with her, Jillian acknowledged that there were several areas of campus life where she tended to share her own experiences with students she was mentoring. She spoke particularly about one area where she receives a lot of questions from first-year students and how her own experience in that area made her comfortable sharing with them:

A lot of students come to me with questions about financial aid and I'm like not an expert. I myself call financial aid probably 7,000 times a year. I spoke to, I

probably spoke to a financial aid advisor about 10 times last summer when we

were trying to get my financial aid fixed and all that and getting all the correct

paperwork for them so I could get more money.

As I probed this theme of sharing with participants from her personal experience a very

interesting topic arose in relation to peer mentoring. Both of the students expressed a

greater willingness to seek assistance from a peer mentor as opposed to a professor or

staff member. The mentor's ability to share based on relatively recent personal

experience combined with being close in age and greater perceived approachability all

contributed to this. Jeremy captured several parts of this when he said:

'Cause she's a student and she's like, our same age. She's been through it and stuff

versus the professor's, like, more generalized. He has a whole bunch of kids and

stuff. And I don't know, he's like, he's more specific. I guess Jillian looks at it

from more of an overview perspective.

It was notable that both of Jillian's mentees felt their peer mentor was a preferred

resource for a number of questions. This coincided with Jillian's experience regarding the

types and numbers of questions she reported from her overall group of first-year students.

I also observed that Jillian passed along advice that she received from her own peer

mentor the previous, year indicating the ongoing impact that this type of relationship can

have.

My observation of Jeremy's meeting with Jillian also yielded what would seem to

be an important cautionary point related to this theme. When speaking about final grades

for the fall semester, Jillian talked with Jeremy about Mr. Smith, one of his professors

who Jillian had for class previously. In listening to their conversation, Jillian seemed

almost to promise that Mr. Smith would help drop a test grade at the end of the semester and Jeremy could count on that when it came to figuring his final grade. While this may be a regular practice on the part of the professor, I found it concerning, especially since Jillian's experience could have been reflective of special considerations Mr. Smith made during the pandemic or other factors of which she was not aware. In this regard, her inexperience as a peer mentor may again have been evident. Despite that, however, the data from Jillian, Jeremy, and Cassidy revealed clear themes about how Jillian is able to successfully help first-year students acclimate to the college experience.

Findings from Carmen's Mentoring Cluster

Carmen was a junior and second-year mentor who is studying engineering. She was from a town not too far from SRSU and chose to enroll there because it was "the closest school and I just didn't want to spend as much money." Carmen was a first-generation Latina student whose parents were both immigrants with an educational background that according to her is "probably fifth-grade max." She was fluent in both English and Spanish. Carmen shared that she had some difficulty making the transition to college herself noting that the classes were difficult especially since she chose to take almost the maximum class load her first semester. Carmen was recruited to work as a peer mentor after serving as a student worker in the division of the University responsible for overseeing the program during her freshman year. She thought the position would be a good fit because she enjoys talking to a variety of students. Despite having multiple students who indicated an initial willingness to participate in the study, only one of Carmen's mentees followed through and took part in the interview and observations.

Natalie, the only one of Carmen's peer mentees who took part in the study, was studying to become a veterinarian. She was white and shared that she likes to play on her cell phone in her free time. Natalie shared that she had a really close relationship with her mother and didn't have to study a lot in high school. In her response to the initial survey, Natalie indicated they she had experienced a lot of change as a result of starting college and that she agreed her peer mentor had been helpful in the transition process. Over the course of the study, Natalie's dog Manny was classified as an Emotional Support Animal and moved into her dorm room with her.

Connecting Students to Campus Resources

Looking through the data on Carmen's work as a mentor, one of the first themes that I discerned regarding how she helped students transition to college were her efforts to connect students to resources on campus that could address their needs. This was one of the initial things Carmen spoke about when I asked her ways she supported first-year students as she said "I mean a lot of our part is connecting people and departments. Later in our conversation she gave one example of this saying "If [a student] needed to talk to a counselor, then my job would be to actually connect them with a counselor or help them set up an appointment." It is important to note that Carmen did not view this responsibility of helping connect students to campus resources as limited to crisis situations or interventions. Rather she also made sure students were connected to "the tutoring and learning center… financial aid, the advising center" or in the case of a student with issues having money to buy food she made sure they found their way to the SRSU Spirit Pantry.

In my discussion with Natalie, she also shared about how "if I were struggling with a certain thing, she [Carmen] would connect me with that certain person I need. At another point she also addressed how Carmen helped get her in touch with resources that could help with classes Natalie was taking:

> And then she also showed me, I think a couple meetings ago, like how to access like the writing center and the math clinic like and schedule appointments and things like that 'cause I was completely unaware that was the thing that you could do, too.

Another important part of this was that even when Carmen did not know the appropriate resource at the time a student asked, she would find an answer and follow up with the student as opposed to just leaving it to the student. Natalie shared "She [Carmen] definitely gives me the right resources when I need them and if she doesn't have them right on hand she usually gets back to me as soon as possible with those resources." Overall, Carmen's efforts to connect first-year students to campus resources meant that they were able to get the support they needed more effectively and efficiently.

Hints to Keep Students on Track

A related, but separate way in which Carmen helped her students in their college transition was by reminding them about and encouraging them to take care of essential tasks. Carmen shared how in addition to communications designed to establish and maintain a connection with first-year students, she would also send out reminders about a variety of things including something as simple as their upcoming meeting. However, she also sent reminders to her mentees about key things they had to do to continue with their education. Natalie shared a good example of this when she noted, "Sometimes [Carmen]

may drop little hints in like the messages she sends every couple of weeks of like if she's like, 'Hey don't forget to do your FAFSA.'" In my observation of the meeting between Natalie and Carmen, I noted that Carmen did this in her meetings as well. During the mentoring session, I observed that Carmen checked to make sure Natalie had submitted her housing application and had inquired about her financial aid status. While it should be noted that these types of reminders are part of the expectations of mentors as part of the program, Carmen's way of weaving these into her overall communication and relationship with her mentees seemed to make it effective since Natalie made note of it.

Hands-on Demonstration

Another way in which Carmen helped her mentees transition to college was by providing hands-on demonstrations of how to navigate and use SRSU systems and procedures. While some might see this as trivial, based on my interactions with the first-year students in this study I would argue it was quite significant. As noted above a common theme among the new students and their perception of their peers was that navigating SRSU systems, processes, and offices could be problematic and frustrating. Carmen was able to mitigate some of those issues by demonstrating to Natalie what to do. Natalie explained:

> Financial aid, they are so far booked out with appointments that I wouldn't be able to get in for the next three months. So, having her there, yeah, having her explain to me like how to fill out my general scholarship application, like immediately definitely gives edge instead of waiting for financial aid to get me in or sitting on the phone with them for three hours while on hold, waiting for them to explain everything to me.

Natalie also shared that this entailed not only the essentials of completing tasks like

registration or financial aid but also guidance on how to do those things more efficiently.

She spoke about how Carmen did this noting, "Yeah, and on a student level, since she

knows how to do it, she has like shortcuts or like you don't have to do this many steps,

you can actually just directly go here and fill it out instead of spending 20 minutes of

again redirecting." Based on the data collected, it seemed that Carmen improved that

experience by showing students like Natalie not only the essentials of completing a

number of required tasks but also helping to complete those more effectively.

Skill Coaching

In addition to helping students learn how to work through SRSU processes and

requirements, Carmen also helped students develop a set of skills that allowed them to

succeed in college. In one of our conversations, Carmen spoke about one of the common

skills she worked on with students saying, "I actually do talk to students about, like, time

management because they give us a session." At a different point, she spoke about

another skill she helps students develop remarking, **"**I sometimes I have been asked to

help them write a professional email. Like, it's important to be respectful and of course

respectful to your professors, just for all obvious reasons." Further evidence of this aspect

of Carmen's work as a mentor was evident in the session I observed with Natalie. In that

meeting, Carmen shared about ways Natalie could promote good self-care. These are just

a few examples of how Carmen helps students develop the skills they need to

successfully transition to college life.

Personal Relationship

A final theme, that perhaps undergirds the forms of support already discussed, was the relationship Carmen developed with many of her peer mentees. At one point she talked about how "They actually do consider me a friend, and me likewise. And every time I see 'em around, we actually say hi and I have a little chit-chat. Not just walk by and ignore each other." The experiences Natalie shared confirmed this about Carmen's approach to mentoring as she stated:

> I was at one of the events, and she came up to me and we started having a conversation like outside of our like meetings and there's times that I see her walking or if we're at the same place, like I don't mind coming up to her and asking her how she's doing 'cause I know she won't like just shrug me off.

Natalie addressed the same theme at another point:

> I do enjoy talking with her. Sometimes we get off topic, but I think it builds that relationship and that trust of like she's here to just bark at me. We're actually building a relationship, a friendship I would say.

In fact, by the time of my second interview with Natalie, after they had been working together for months, Natalie commented, "I think it just ties back to I feel like I don't wanna say I have an older sister, but she is an upperclassman where I could almost consider her as like a sibling as in the way I can talk to her."

An important piece of this relational emphasis in Carmen's mentoring work was availability and she spoke about how she encouraged her first-year students to "Always feel free to reach out." Natalie also brought up this point saying, "I'd say yeah, she is accessible, and it's a lot easier listening to her and a lot less confusing than trying to listen

to housing and financial aid." This accessibility and developing relationship meant that Natalie had been faithful in meeting with Carmen during the year. In our second interview, Natalie said something that seemed to encapsulate this well when she shared:

> I definitely like meeting with her. She's very approachable, she's friendly. Like I feel like if I had a peer mentor who was just there for the job just to get it done, I would be a little bit more resistant to going. But anytime she sends out her email like, hey schedule your mentor meeting, I'm usually the first one to be like okay.

Natalie's experience affirmed Carmen's assertion that she was able to build positive relationships with first-year students and be a friend to whom they can turn for help during their college transition.

Findings from Peter's Mentoring Cluster

Peter, a white man, was also a second-year mentor who was studying communications, though he said he didn't know what he planned to do with that degree. He reported that he met regularly with his peer mentor as a freshman and said "She just was really cool and chill, and we, you know, kinda gelled. We became friends. I was like, oh well, I'll just keep going to these meetings." After meeting with his peer mentor regularly during his freshman year, she recruited Peter to work in the program and put in him touch with Andrea, the program director, who hired him starting his sophomore year. His responses to the initial survey indicated that he strongly agreed that a number of his first-year students had been experiencing considerable change and he felt he had been able to help them adjust to college life. At the start of the study, Peter was one of only two male peer mentors out of a group of about 20 in total. In the course of the year, one other male peer mentor was hired as well.

The first of Peter's peer mentees to take part in the survey was Alexander, an African American man from a small town in state, though he was not originally from out of state. Alexander was studying business and had been living with family other than his parents before starting at SRSU. He indicated that in the past he had struggled when trying to adapt to change sharing that "Actually I couldn't do it for some reason. I was all nervous and stuff and freaking out. And I wanted to stay home and stuff like that." During the first round of interviews, which took place in the fall semester Alexander stated very directly that without support from Peter, he would have dropped out of college. He shared "Usually with me I get overstressed about things and I would stop doing them, like quit doing it." According to Alexander, without his peer mentor, he would have fallen into this same pattern when confronted with the stresses of college and quit.

This is particularly interesting because of all the students who started the interview and observation process in the study, Alexander was the only one who did not complete it. After the first interview, we discussed me observing a mentoring meeting and then doing a second interview. We confirmed these plans by email and text. However, in the spring semester, Alexander stopped meeting with his peer mentor. At one point late in the semester he scheduled a meeting with Peter, but then canceled last minute and never rescheduled. He also stopped responding to my texts. I don't know how the first year finished for Alexander.

Peter's second mentee who participated in the survey was Jennifer, a white woman studying animal science. My first interview with Jennifer took place in the SRSU Student Center while I was on campus to also observe a couple of mentoring sessions.

The second interview was done over Zoom like the others. Jennifer is a Christian and the importance of her faith came through in my conversations with her as well as the mentoring session that observed. I highlight this because one of the things I noticed was that Peter seemed to have difficulty at times knowing how to relate to this part of her life. My background meant that I was familiar with one of the faith-based campus organizations with which she was involved as well as a spring break mission project she attended. In her interactions with both me and her peer mentor, Jennifer seemed to share openly when asked questions but often did not volunteer other information. Over the course of the study, Jennifer's family was going through some difficult transitions that coincided with her trying to adapt to college life. In her survey responses, Jennifer strongly agreed that she was experiencing lots of change as she started college and agreed that her peer mentor had been helpful in helping her make that transition.

Giving Guidance and Advice

When considering the data on Peter's work as a mentor, one of the strongest themes I observed was how he drew on personal experience and his mentor training to give guidance and advice to his mentees. Peter recognized this about his approach stating in one instance "I like to think I, you know, try to offer advice when I can." At another point when I asked Peter about some examples, he spoke for almost 3 minutes about various examples of advice or guidance he tended to give to students when he met with them. Alexander also observed this when reflecting on how Peter's mentoring approach worked. For example, Alexander shared about his meetings with Peter saying, "It is a good thing to go to it. Because the peer mentor can help you with stuff you're going through and kinda give you advice of how to go through it."

In his discussion of this part of his approach to helping first-year students, Peter noted that in sharing this guidance and advice he was working to fill in gaps in students' knowledge. He noted:

'Cause there's a lot of things people don't tell you when you come, you know, anywhere. You know, like whether it's a job or whatever. There's just little tiny, you know, daily activities that people just kind of guess take for granted, and say, you know, it's like, I'll tell 'em like, "Oh no, the quickest way the library isn't that way, it's this way." Stuff like that. And I guess, you know, it's just whatever comes up in conversation, like oh that's relevant.

Important within Peter's approach was how he drew on personal experience for the advice and guidance he provided to students. When I asked him about this directly, he responded:

I think I've had a pretty broad, like, general college experience, and I try to, like, relate that to 'em. Oftentimes it'll come up like, you know, when I learned you have to register at 6:00 AM to get good classes at SRSU, you know, I like to tell all of them that. And some of 'em, it's an eyeopener to 'em. They're like, "Oh, I was gonna wake up at nine and do it." Like, no, no. If you want your classes, like, it's at 6:00 AM.

Jennifer's experience aligned with this as well. She shared how her approach to registering for classes had been shaped by advice Peter provided. At another juncture in our conversation, Peter shared another example:

The gym, I like to tell them, you know, like I go, you know, if it comes up in conversation, I tell 'em like, yeah, I go these times because there is not a, there's a

group of people there who go at like, I guess around five, and they're, you know, all like bodybuilders and power lifters. So, they take up most of the racks, and you can't really get much done.

At another point, Peter seemed to sum up this part of his mentoring style when he said, "I try to give them as much information that I think is relevant, and let them kind of pick and choose what they need."

In providing guidance and advice Peter did not rely just on personal experience but often shared information with his mentees he had collected from other people. He even spoke at one point about how he had called his sister to get advice to relay to a mentee. In another instance, he shared "I do happen to have a weird amount of nursing major friends…. So, if they [his peer mentees] have questions, oftentimes I'll ask them [the nursing students he knows]." While Peter did connect students with resources, he more often than other peer mentors seemed to focus on getting the student an answer or piece of information rather than connecting them to someone else to address their needs.

Asking Questions

Another facet of Peter's mentoring approach that stood out to me in analyzing his work was the number of questions he asked. In this regard, it is important to remember that I was only able to observe one of Peter's mentees. However, I was struck at the time and in reviewing the transcript later about the number of questions he asked. This may have something to do with Jennifer and his understanding of her as an individual. In our final interview, both Peter and I noted that Jennifer tended to answer questions in a short and direct manner. Even attempts at open-ended questions were often met with one or two sentences. This might also be tied to Peter's just-discussed tendency to try to provide

guidance and advice that his mentees needed. The questions might have helped him process what type of information he felt he needed to relay.

This use of questions was something Peter recognized about the way he supported first-year students. At one point he shared how he had "learned how to make them [first-year students] talk I guess, you know, by asking, like, open-ended questions." He also shared the reason behind this sharing **"**If you ask the right questions, they kinda open up, you know, most of the time." Peter appeared to achieve this goal of using questions to get students to open up. Alexander's experience with Peter reflected that. He noted that while usually, "I don't, like, talk about myself. I'm more to myself," with Peter things were different, "I talk to him."

Understanding Students

This leads to another theme in Peter's mentoring style, his ability to understand the students with whom he was working. This understanding seemed to exist both on an individual level as well as in Peter's ability to recognize common threads that ran through student experiences and needs. On an individual level, Peter spoke about how he tried to "make it more personal and like, you know, sound like a real person." He also noted at another point "So, I get to, you know, learn a little bit about them and just see different personalities and different majors, and how different people react." Based on Alexander's experience it appeared that Peter's attempts in this area were successful. Alexander shared of Peter "Yeah, he is a pretty cool guy. And he understands me a lot." Likewise, Jennifer felt that Peter was interested in her as a person and was engaged with the things she wanted from the peer mentoring relationship overall.

Peter's understanding of students was also evident on a larger scale. Peter seemed to have a good grasp of the issues facing new students at SRSU. Of all the people with whom I spoke, he spent the most time discussing these challenges and he provided the most examples when I asked him about first-year transition issues. This longer excerpt provides an example of Peter's understanding of students at SRSU:

> I guess there's some distinct categories. Like, you have the ones who are fine. And I tell 'em this, I'm like, "Okay, you obviously have it together. You know what you're doing. I'm here if you need me." You have the ones who, they got it. Then you have the ones who are a little bit rough. They're super smart, they can do all their classwork, they're A's and B's in high school. They have, you know, they're not the most social people in the world. They haven't quite figured that out yet. Some mentees, like I said, have trouble with the going to class and stuff like that. And like, I wanna say self-motivating, but I think there's a better word, I guess discipline, to like, you know, do it on their own. 'Cause you kinda have the ones who are, you know, their parents or somebody, you know, made 'em do everything in high school, and so now they're not doing it themselves, 'cause nobody's here to watch 'em. I have ones with just technical issues like, you know, using websites and all the stuff that's kind of difficult.

At another point, while we were talking about first-year students participating in this study, Peter shared an important insight that in addition to demonstrating his familiarity with SRSU students also spoke to an issue that affected and was reflected in the participant makeup of this study. Speaking about his experience with male first-year students he reflected "The guys are definitely harder just wise to not connect with but just

get there… yeah, it's just, they're different. It's gonna be hard to get a response from them."

While overall Peter was very successful in his efforts to understand individuals and groups of students, Jennifer's experience did seem to underline at least one potential weakness in this area. As previously noted, faith in God as well as involvement with church and campus ministry groups were very important to Jennifer. However, based on the interviews and observations I conducted, this was one area where Peter seemed less comfortable. In the meeting, I observed that when Jennifer was discussing her mission trip Peter seemed to move on from that far more quickly than other topics she raised. Furthermore, in my conversation with him, he did not seem to recognize the importance of the trip to Jennifer. She noted Peter never told her not to talk about her faith, but she did indicate she after mentioning the mission trip to him she did not really discuss her faith more.

Identifying and Addressing Less Obvious Student Needs

Perhaps because of his focus on asking questions and trying to understand his first-year students, Peter was in a position to address specific and varied student needs. Alexander's experience reflected a couple of different manifestations of this. First, Alexander shared how Peter helped with his food insecurity issues saying "He has told me about the Spirit Pantry and stuff like that. And I actually did sign up for that stuff." Alexander went on to explain "The Spirit Pantry is for students that can't provide and stuff like that. So, they go there and you can have food." He further spoke about Peter providing forms of emotional support as well. This exchange from my interview with Alexander illustrated this well.

> Alexander: So, in high school, I did go to counseling. It was just, something like that I did.
>
> Blair Yeah.
>
> Alexander: But it actually never actually could help me. Like Peter could.
>
> Blair Okay. What's better about Peter and what he's doing as opposed to what was happening in high school?
>
> Alexander: Well Peter, he's like. So, he's like a college student like me, so he kinda gets it like right now at this point. But with a counselor, they like always have the questions and it's like a routine thing for them.

Jennifer also noted Peter's ability to recognize her need for and provide emotional support saying that while they "just talked about, like, little things" it was helpful to her.

In my discussions with Peter, he also spoke about other expressions of this. One key way he spoke about meeting student needs was by functioning as a place where they could vent. He shared:

> I had one girl like that and then some of them just like, I guess they see me as a person like to vent to a lot because I'm not involved at all and I don't know anybody else. And even if I did, you know, I'm not gonna say anything. And so they see me as a person they can kind of vent to and, you know, that's cool too.

At another point, he spoke about how students would often need a place to talk through personal issues. In summarizing a hypothetical example of a conversation, Peter said:

> "Well, I'm thinking about breaking up with my boyfriend or something." And it's like, whoa. You know, you wouldn't tell your friend that. So, that's interesting.

That's, I've had similar things happen like that, and they just kind of dump

information on you.

He also noted that students often needed to vent about roommates and classes. These

were the two most common topics in his experience. In other cases, Peter found that

students needed encouragement so he would "try to motivate 'em" or if a student wasn't

"very outgoing, I guess, you know, I try to be their friend and be really nice to 'em."

Overall, Alexander provided a concise explanation saying of Peter, "He's been actually

very helpful."

Empowering Students

In examining Peter's work as a mentor, I noted that an additional way he helped

first-year students was to attempt to empower them. He did this by encouraging them to

take responsibility for managing novel experiences or handling difficulties that might

arise. Peter spoke multiple times about encouraging students to talk to roommates or

professors with whom they might be struggling. While he did discuss support resources

available to them, he tried to get them to address the issue on their own knowing that help

would be available if needed. Alexander shared an example of this when he was

discussing things he would not have done without encouragement and support from

Peter. He shared "I am, like, antisocial. I don't like talking and stuff like that… [Peter]

helped me find the courage to go up there… and talk to them… And went up and actually

talked to the clubs and people."

As part of his efforts, Peter noted how he tried to get students to take

responsibility for their college experience. He spoke about this saying "I always tell

them, they never like it, but I always tell them it's not [high school], you know. You have

a lot more free time and it's a lot more self-discipline to get things done and, you know.

He added at another point that he tries to explain that professors wouldn't "stay on top of you" like in high school. In these ways, Peter tries to empower students and help them take responsibility for their own experience and success.

A Temporary Support

A final theme that I discerned in Peter's case was the idea that the work of the peer mentor was transitory. This really stood out to me in looking at Peter's relationship with Jennifer. She was a great example of a first-year student moving beyond the need for a mentor. She shared how he had found other people to fill those needs. In particular, she had found friends and even new mentors in church and faith-based student organizations on campus. She stated at one point in our second interview "I have like other, like, friends or like people who I know, they're like mentors, kind of, that are different that I know I can talk to as well."

That does not mean Jennifer saw no value in her peer mentoring relationship. Quite the contrary. But while she viewed that relationship as something that was beneficial, she also saw it as temporary. It had been supplanted by new relationships she developed. She shared:

> So, I feel like last semester, before I had all those connections, it did help, like, to
> have that [a peer mentor] but now that I've, like, grown and have those other
> connections they, like, 'cause I know I'll carry those, like, throughout my life.

So, while her peer mentor was able to help her transition to college, "Now it's like, I don't really need one."

Peter also recognized this and how this temporary role fit into what he was trying to help students accomplish. Speaking of the peer mentoring relationship he reflected:

It's really kind of another catch net for just stuff like that. And then it really helps the ones who utilize it and realize what they can do with it. You know, because, you know, I might not be friends with them, but at the end of the day, if they can get help from me, you know, and they can come back to the university and finish their degree because I helped them out, great.

This idea of being a safety net to act as a temporary support, if needed while students like Jennifer develop more permanent support networks was an important aspect of how Peter helps students transition to college.

Findings from Carolyn's Cluster

The final mentoring cluster included in this study consisted of Carolyn and two of her mentees. Carolyn was a senior and in her third year as a peer mentor. She was studying English and was scheduled to graduate at the end of the year in which I conducted the study. Carolyn's participation in this study was noteworthy and important for a few reasons. First, out of all the peer mentors she had the most mentees who completed the survey and indicated a willingness to be interviewed and observed for the study. In addition, most of those students agreed or strongly agreed that she had helped them with their transition to college. While this was typical of the mentors whose clusters were selected as cases in this study, I note it because of its consistency across more respondents in the initial survey. Third, she was part of the first group of paid peer mentors when the program first received grant funding and expanded to try and serve all new students at SRSU. Finally, she helped assemble the resource binder that is provided

to SRSU peer mentors during training and worked with the program director in helping to structure the mentoring training sessions. As such her cluster seems to represent a particularly data-rich case. Her own survey responses indicated that Carolyn strongly agreed both that her mentees had been dealing with lots of changes as they started college and that she felt she had been able to help them in that process.

The two mentees from Carolyn's cluster who participated in the interview and observation parts of the study were Pamela and Paula. Pamela is a white woman who is working full-time while studying education at SRSU. She shared that "I work 35 hours a week and I have 18 hours a semester." This was not a new phenomenon for her, however, as in high school she "was at school by 6:00 AM, didn't leave till 7:00, then I went to work from 7:30 till 11:00, and then repeated day in, day out." Pamela grew up in Cherry where SRSU is located and actually had a relative who worked at the university. Living in Cherry, she also chose to commute rather than live on campus and thus represented a different college experience and transition than other participants. Pamela also completed a number of dual credit and AP classes in high school, so she expected to complete college in three years. In her survey responses, Pamela indicated that her transition to college had entailed a lot of change.

The final participant, Paula was a white woman studying sociology who added a second major, theatre, during the second semester of her first year. In talking about her college experience Paula initially spoke about getting involved on campus through the Christian sorority that she joined during her first semester. This was important for her because she shared that one of her concerns about starting college was making friends. In her initial survey responses, Paula indicated neutrality on whether she had experienced a

lot of change as she started college and whether her peer mentor had been helpful in navigating those changes. In her interviews, however, Pamela shared that she met regularly with Carolyn as well as a number of ways in which her peer mentor had aided her transition.

Utilizing an Activity in the Mentoring Binder

The first prominent theme that I discerned in the data for Carolyn's mentoring work was the use of the different activities in the mentoring binder. This emphasis is not surprising given Carolyn's role in helping to assemble the various activities contained in that binder. This not only made her more familiar with the materials but also possibly more invested in using them with her mentees. I noticed that in both meetings I observed Carolyn worked through one of the activities in the binder with her mentee.

This theme was also present in the interview data. Paula, speaking about the binder, noted "So [Carolyn] has an activities notebook which has different things that they can offer to students to do during the meetings. And so typically I go through it, I pick the one that I wanna do and we do one of those." At another point in our discussion, Pamela reiterated that activities from the binder were a common feature of their meetings. Paula also reflected on one of these excises where Carolyn helped her to start a planner:

> We kind of planned out, like, what the busiest week for me would look like, and then like how to block out time like for myself, how to block out time for homework, and, like, how much I need to spend on each of those things to have, like, a full and balanced, like, life I guess.

Paula also shared about another activity they worked on from the binder saying "We did like a studying one. So like, I took a quiz to find out what kind of learner I am. To find

out more about the best ways to study, and we did that around like finals time." Importantly when I asked her what she took from that exercise she replied, "I learned that a good way for me to remember things is to read them...out loud." So not only did the students complete the activities, but they were also able to take away valuable skills to use during their college experience. It should be noted that Pamela remembered doing this exercise as well as some of her takeaways from it months later in my second interview with her.

Carolyn also spoke about her use of the activities in the mentoring binder in my interviews with her. Remembering one of the exercises she had used with Pamela she recounted how Pamela:

Decided to pick some activities in October. I see that we did a social identity activity. She was kind of interested in what that was, which we kinda had a conversation about like the different ways you can identify yourself as a person and how other people might strongly identify by some of the factors that we had. We have the social identity wheel.

In addition to sharing how she used the activities with students in this study, Carolyn also shared about their role in her work more broadly and the ones students tended to use more often saying:

The ones that I end up using the most each year and this I've found us a trend since we created it is time management, study habits, learning skills, concentration, and then surprisingly saving money. I have a lot of students come to me asking, hey, can you talk to me about how to save money? And so we do have a session plan about that. So, we kind of talk about that. And then of course

how to make friends. That was really big last semester, not so much this semester, but still those time and true study habits, time management, learning skills. Those are the the most widely used.

Both Carolyn and her mentees thought that these activities in the mentoring binder were an effective tool by Carolyn was able to help students develop needed skills in a wide array of areas.

Trying to Understand Deeper Student Needs

Another theme that stood out in the interviews and observations of Carolyn's mentoring cluster was how she focused on seeing more deeply how the students were doing in a wide range of areas. She did this by asking broad questions that gave the students a chance to answer but also paid attention to their answers and demeanor to determine if she ought to ask follow-up questions. A couple of short excerpts from mentoring sessions illustrated this well. The first came from a meeting I observed between Carolyn and Pamela:

Carolyn: So, semester, how's it going? How are we feeling about classes so far?

Pamela: It's fine. It's just like last semester.

Carolyn: Okay.

Pamela: They're all the same.

Carolyn: Okay.

Pamela: They're not bad or anything.

Carolyn: Awesome. (Both laughing) Do you have a favorite class yet?

Pamela: Not really. I mean, 'cause I have two sciences and then two online classes.

The other was from a meeting between Paula and Carolyn that I observed:

> Carolyn: Oh, gotcha. That's okay. So how have you been? Haven't seen you in a hot minute. So how was break and all the things?
>
> Paula: It was pretty good. I had my first PT appointment today.
>
> Carolyn: Okay.
>
> Paula: I went good and then we had our show on Saturday.
>
> Carolyn: Awesome.

In my interviews with them, both Pamela and Paula noted this dynamic about their meetings with Carolyn. Paula shared, "We talk about how our lives are going, if anything's bothering me, or this, that, and so forth." Likewise, Pamela noted that "Most of my meetings with Carolyn are very similar to each other as we do an activity each time and talk about how my classes are going." Carolyn also reflected on this in my interview with her. It is worth noting that she does not take student answers at face value but really tries to pay attention to what they are saying and how they are acting. She shared:

> So, I try to, I kinda try to read their body language, or like sometimes they'll like bring up something like I'll ask, "How are classes going?" And they're like, "Oh, they're okay." And I'm like, "Oh, why just okay?" And they're like, "Oh, well, I mean, they're pretty good." And then I'm like, "Okay, nope. Let's go one by one. Let's talk about it." I really try to kind of draw out some specific answers from them.

She returned to this briefly at another point saying, "They're like, 'Oh, yeah, everything's fine.' And I'm like, 'Are you sure? (both laughing) Let's talk about it.'" Carolyn was

intentional about seeing how the students she is meeting with were doing, not just at surface level, but by trying to deeply engage and listen to their responses.

An essential part of this was how Carolyn used questions to assess needs her mentees might have as part of their transition process. For example, in our conversations, she shared that she used "the question 'why' to my advantage all the time. I'm like, well why is that? Like why do you think that or why do you feel that way?" At another point she noted "I'll ask some more probing questions to be like, okay, well like are you very involved? Like, do you feel like you're busy all the time? You know, how often do you study?" At another point, she spoke at length about how she used questions to try and understand specific issues, in this case around academic performance that students were encountering. Carolyn explained:

> I kind of ask questions of like, you know, in the classes you're struggling with like give me one class for example, do you feel like you're struggling learning the material? Is it the way the professor is presenting it to you? Do you feel like you understand it in class and then you get to the homework and makes no sense? Does all of it not make sense? Does the homework make sense, but not the exam? And so, kind of trying to figure out is it how they're studying, is it the way they're trying to learn the material? Are they utilizing tutoring and SI and all of the achievement centers and clinics on campus to help them?

In addition to Carolyn reporting this in our interviews, it was also something I noted when observing her peer mentoring meetings. For example, in a discussion of Paula's summer schedule, Carolyn posed an important question asking, "Do you feel like you're prepared to take full summer course loads?" As she worked through activities with Paula

or Pamela it was also common for her to ask questions like "Do you have any questions on anything?" as they progressed through the task. Questions for Carolyn were a tool not just to see how students are doing, but to judge what types of assistance and skill development they might need in their college transition.

Recognizing Limitations and Using Appropriate Campus or Other Resources

While Carolyn worked with students to develop skills they needed for college and provided other forms of support she was also aware of her limits as a peer mentor and very intentional about encouraging students to use campus resources. Reflecting on this balance she noted students "[Seem] like they really are needing peer mentoring and needing their resources on campus." At another point in our conversations, Carolyn spoke about one of her mentees who did not end up participating in the interviews and observation part of the study and shared, "It looks like she has been going to tutoring, so that's really awesome that she utilized the resources that I gave her." Speaking about another essential campus resource she said:

> I know there's been a lot of mental support and emotional support that have been needed. I think a lot of my students have been struggling with that transition being away from home and also managing all the other things. So, I think mental health has been a bit of a struggle, but they have been utilizing counseling resources on campus, which has been really good."

In my observation of Carolyn's meeting with Pamela, she brought up campus resources when Pamela broached the topic of struggling with a science class. While Carolyn demonstrated a wide range of skills in her peer mentoring work, she recognized that

certain issues were beyond the scope of her role and tried to make sure students had campus resources to address those areas of need.

In addition, however, our interchanges also indicated that Carolyn recognized there were situations where, or students for whom, even these on-campus services were not the solution first-year students needed. The following excerpt from our discussions highlighted some examples of that:

Blair: So, one of the things I've heard you talk about is connecting students with resources. Sometimes campus resources. Are there off-campus resources or other things that you sometimes connect students with also?

Carolyn: There can be.

Blair: Okay.

Carolyn: I know when it comes to, especially with like mental health, if a student is like, "I went to SRSU's counseling. I did not like it." And then I'm like, "Okay, well, here are some campus, the resources outside of campus that you could look into."

Blair: Yeah

Carolyn: I try to encourage them to go to campus first because they don't have to pay for it.

Blair: Yeah.

Carolyn: But then when it comes to off-campus things, I try to give some other options. Or when it comes to, if they feel like they're struggling with food insecurity, while we do have the SRSU Spirit Pantry, which is a free resource for

them and they can go in and get whatever food they need, there are also several

different ones around the community that also help with that.

Carolyn's mentoring approach balanced her own work with the appropriate use of both

campus and when necessary off-campus resources to support first-year students in their

college transition.

Individualized Approach

A final theme that emerged from the study of Carolyn's work as a peer mentor

was how even as she wove together the different forms of support for her peer mentees

she did so in a way that addressed the particular questions or needs of each student. She

noted that this was something about which she was very intentional. At one point

Carolyn shared:

> I like to tell my students, I try to do a very individualized approach with my
>
> mentoring of, you get to choose like what you wanna do with this time. You're not
>
> just gonna sit here and do nothing, but you get to kind of choose and guide what
>
> you wanna do.

Pamela addressed this as she shared:

> So, she has an activities notebook which has different things that they can offer to
>
> students to do during the meetings. And so typically I go through it, I pick the one
>
> that I wanna do and we do one of those.

Paula spoke to this as well discussing how Carolyn allowed her to shape their sessions.

She said "Yeah, [Carolyn] always opens up with like you having questions or concerns

and… then she will close it with is there anything that this has sparked that you need help

with?" Paula also provided a great summary of this aspect of Carolyn's approach saying of her experience with peer mentoring, "It can be whatever you need it to be."

I also observed this theme in several ways during Carolyn's meetings with Pamela and Paula. First, with Paula in addition to having her choose an issue that would work on, Paula asked to work on her ability to say no, Carolyn also made sure that they worked through the activity in a way that was focused on Paula's specific situation. In this meeting time management was the topic that Pamela selected. Carolyn shared some of her own techniques for addressing the topic Paula raised but did so in a way that left Paula the freedom to decide how to proceed. As a result of this discussion, they decided to work through a scheduling process activity so Paula would have a better sense of what she actually had the reasonable ability to say yes to. In that process, Carolyn gave some common examples to help Paula understand the activity. However, Carolyn was purposeful about making certain Pamela chose something that was related to her particular needs.

A similar scenario played out in Pamela's meeting with Carolyn. In this case, Carolyn and Pamela were working on goal setting. Again, Carolyn provided a number of generic examples to help guide the discussion but made sure that Pamela was driving the process by asking a series of questions. Carolyn asked things like "Do you like any of those?," "How would you define more in-depth?", "what is something you think you can do daily?", and "Which would you rather do?", to give a few examples. In working with her peer mentees, Carolyn demonstrated an ability to tailor the forms of support she provided to her first-year students to their precise needs and interests thereby helping them get what they need to make a successful transition to college.

Cross-Case Analysis

When looking at the data as a whole, it became evident that there was considerable commonality in the ways in which the peer mentors assisted the transition of their first-year students. This was perhaps due to a combination of factors such as the shared training and expectations of the SRSU mentoring program as well as the fact that all the first-year students were undergoing a shared change (starting college). The shared underlying change may result in similarities among first-year student needs.

Significantly, however, within that overarching similarity, there was notable variation in areas of emphasis and approach by the individual mentors as discussed in the within-case analysis. This cross-case analysis is intended to both identify areas of overlap in the work of the four peer mentors in this study as well as highlight the different areas of emphasis in each of their approaches. The section will also note a few themes common to the peer mentors that, while deemed not significant enough to warrant inclusion on an individual basis above, emerged when considered together. In this cross-case analysis, I will also connect the ways in which the peer mentors aid the transition of their first-year students to Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework. I will do this by first using the initial phase of the framework, Approaching Transitions, to guide my discussion of how the peer mentors aided students understand their college transition. I will then use the 4s phase of the model to consider the ways in which the peer mentors supported students attempts to cope with the transitions they were going through as they started college.

Peer Mentoring and Approaching Transitions

The first phase of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework, Approaching Transitions, centered on recognizing the types of change that are taking place. Within this was a consideration of whether individuals expected the changes that were taking place. Overall, the data did not indicate this was a part of the transition process where the first-year students needed or sought considerable assistance from their peer mentors. This makes sense as starting college required certain levels of preparation and action on the students' part. It is therefore what Schlossberg (Anderson et al., 2021) termed an anticipated transition. The mentees indicated they generally recognized that lives were different as a result of starting college and had time to prepare for what was coming.

In addition, in the case of these participants, they also followed through on their intent, meaning that college transition was an event rather than a non-event. So, starting college for these participants was a deliberate change and one that, at least from the broader perspective, went as planned, that is to say, they started college. It was more in the areas of making sense of the nature and recognizing the scope of the change brought on by starting college where the mentors were able to assist their mentees. Within this, a few motifs emerged in relation to how peer mentors helped first-year students.

College Versus High School

The first of these patterns I noted was that first-year students frequently did not fully anticipate all the ways in which college was different from high school. The data reflected this clearly in the areas of classwork, study skills, and study habits. For example, Jillian observed that students were often surprised at the pace of class noting,

"Yeah. They like, they know that college is very different than high school and junior college, but they just didn't expect that teachers will go guns a blazing from like second day." An essential message that peer mentors tried to convey to first-year students was the need for new and/or better ways to prepare for class and learn the material.

The first-year students in this study reflected this reality in what they shared as well. At one point Cassidy shared:

> Now that I'm in college I'd definitely say I put a lot more time into studying, for sure. A lot of my time is spent… in the library, or just even in my dorm. You know, when it comes to high school, you don't, you do have to study, but not, it's kind of just like preparing for the class.

Similarly, Jeremy said:

> I had to basically relearn how to like study everything from high school. I guess the way of getting the material across has been like the hardest thing for me. 'Cause like high school I guess it was a lot easier and then like college, I don't know, I guess the amount information is the most difficult thing. Like figure out how to get that much information that quickly in a way I could learn it.

Even for students like Pamela who had taken multiple dual enrollment classes academics still were at least "a little bit more difficult."

Natalie noted another part of this difference when she reflected on the relative maturity and focus of students. She revealed:

> So, in high school like you have the mature kids. And then here in college everybody is very mature. Their minds are set on certain things, and I think that

really helped the transitioning to know that I have people around me who have the

same goals and aspirations that I do.

It is noteworthy that this commonality of purpose and, despite what stereotypes we may

hold regarding college students, a strongly perceived increase in maturity was very

positive in helping her to college life. So, despite recognizing on some levels the college

will be different than high school, most first-year still did not fully appreciate the range of

ways in which that is true.

The Magnitude of Life Impact

Another pattern that I discerned in the data was that new students tended to

underestimate the amount of starting college would have on their day-to-day lives.

Homesickness was a common way this showed up in the data. Peer mentors and students

alike spoke about first-year students missing home and wanting to return home every

weekend. Others like Natalie had to deal with being away from pets. Alexander

illustrated another facet of this well when speaking about mealtimes. Rather than

"Having… home-cooked meals from [his] family" Alexander had to make plans to go to

the dining hall or visit the Spirit Pantry so he could prepare food in his room. Participants

also reflected students on having to manage things like financial aid and class registration

in order to continue their studies. In general, students were surprised by the ways and

degree to which starting college transformed their day-to-day lives.

Peer Mentoring and Coping with Changes

While the peer mentors were able to aid first-year students in the Approaching

Transitions phase, the majority of their work with their mentees was associated with the

second phase of the model. This took place as the mentors helped the first-year students

recognize existing, identify new, and utilize various coping resources as they went through the college transition. The first of the four areas where the peer mentors demonstrated this was Situation.

Situation

The initial S of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) model examined the Situation within which the transition takes place. This considered the personal as well as broader context of the changes an individual might be experiencing. While the Transition Framework included eight subpoints, I will discuss those that emerged in the data regarding the peer mentors' work with the first-year students.

The first way in which the peer mentors aided first-year students in relation to their situation was by helping students understand how much control they had over their situation. The Theme of Empowering Students observed in Peter's mentoring was illustrative of this. By helping and encouraging students to address roommate conflicts, struggles with professors, or the temptation to self-isolate socially, Peter supported a mindset in which the first-year students were not helpless victims of circumstance but rather could be active agents who chose how they reacted and exercised control in their own lives. Jillian's work Getting Students Involved in Social Life was another example of this. The way in which she encouraged Jeremy to initiate social contact helped support a recognition that he had considerable control in making connections with people, rather than simply waiting and hoping this would happen.

Another way the peer mentors aided their first-year students with the Situation part of the transition as by helping them compare and contrast what they were dealing with as first-year college students to their experiences in high school. As previously

noted, one thing that I noted in the data were discussions about how different high school was from college. In these discussions, the peer mentors tried to help their mentees adapt to the ways in which the things to which the first-year students were accustomed in high school were different now that they were in post-secondary education. Peter's sharing about the higher level of expectation and difference in the relationship between college professors as compared to high school teachers was a good example of this. Carolyn also demonstrated this by working with students to help them understand the relationship between their preferred learning styles and the different ways in which various college classes functioned. Likewise, Jillian's attempts to help students adjust to the faster pace of college classes supported this theme as well.

Andrew's decision to stay in school also aligned with this part of the Transition Framework. In this case, he was able to not only recognize a past pattern of failed choices that had implications for his reaction to college but with Peter's help he was able to make decisions and change his approach so that his response in this instance was different. Andrew's past pattern of quitting when things got difficult was not repeated in this case, at least through his first year in college. His previous experience was important but did not automatically dictate his decision about staying in college.

Finally, within Situation, the peer mentors also helped students as they began to understand and balance the roles they held in the different aspects of their lives. One of the key transitional issues discussed above was the increased levels of freedom first-year students experienced. In the midst of this, the peer mentors worked to aid students as they figured out how to balance the new or changed roles they held. Peter's discussions with Jennifer about needing to work to help cover expenses were an example of this. Likewise,

the numerous discussions mentors had with and reported related to time management fit this theme as well. The specifics varied based on the student, but the peer mentors tried to aid them as the first-year students sought to balance the various roles that were a part of their lives in college and the associated time commitments.

Self

Another overarching motif that I detected in the data was the way in which peer mentors sought to understand, affirm, and build upon the individuality of the first-year students with whom they worked. Self, the second S in Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) framework, was about appreciating the unique constitution of every person. Whether it be Jillian's attempt to Make a Personal Connection, Peter's focus on Understanding Students, Carmen's emphasis on Personal Relationships, or Carolyn's Individualized Approach, all the peer mentors focused on distinguishing the distinct characteristics of their mentees and helping them navigate their college transition in light of those individualities.

With Carolyn, this was evident in various aspects of her work with first-year students. The theme of the Individualized Approach I discussed above permeated all aspects of her mentoring approach. For example, it connected with Carolyn's Trying to Understand Deep Needs theme as this was a means by which she was able to understand how her students differed from one another and therefore how their support needs were distinctive. Her use of the binder exercise on identity with Pamela was another example of this. Carolyn's attempts to help students understand their preferred learning style were also related to her approach of seeking to understand each student as a unique individual.

For Carmen, this manifested most notably in the way she sought to develop a Personal Relationship with each of her students. Natalie affirmed this in speaking about how she felt like Carmen was a sort of sibling to whom she could reach out if needed. That language about a sister-like relationship reflects a deep level of personal knowledge. This is closely related to Jillian's theme of Trying to Make a Personal Connection. In this, she sought to know her first-year students well enough as people that she could find points of connection, like the Taylor Swift fandom she held in common with Natalie. This required Carmen and Jillian to learn the interests, personalities, and other individual traits of their mentees. This carried over into, for example, how Jillian was able to give first-year students activity and campus organization suggestions targeted to their needs and comforts.

Finally, with Peter this motif connected to his drive and penchant for Understanding Students. Through his interactions with students, he was able to recognize unique things about them as well as commonalities that tied them together. His connection with Jennifer around the similarities in their backgrounds or his recognition of the reserved personal nature of both Andrew and Jennifer illustrated this. This commonality then formed the foundation from which he approached his role of Addressing Student Needs. Because he knew the students as particular selves, he was able to personalize Giving Guidance and Advice as well as Addressing Student Needs. He, like the other mentors, supported their first-year students by recognizing and valuing those students' individuality which enabled the peer mentors to then customize the forms of support they provided.

Support

One of the fundamental challenges first-year students encountered, as previously discussed, was the loss or at least substantial change that occurred to their support networks. Family, friends, intimate relationships, and community groups which had served to help mitigate stress in the lives of the students previously, may have been completely unavailable or at least less accessible precisely at a time when students were undergoing dramatic changes in their lives. This created a need in the lives of students which this study suggests was a primary area in which peer mentors could assist students as they transitioned to college. The data suggested that the mentors did this in two ways: 1) They helped the students create new support networks that helped address the challenges and stresses of college, and 2) the peer mentors acted as a temporary support system for students while they constructed these new networks.

Helping Students Create a New Support Network. One of the strongest cross-case themes from this study was the importance of peer mentors in helping students build a new support network by facilitating connections to resources and people on campus as well as in the community. The resource portion of this was reflected in Jillian's Walking Students to a Needed Resource, Carmen's Connecting Students to Campus Resources, Carolyn's Using Campus and Other Resources, and aspects of Peter's Addressing Student Needs themes. Whether it be tutoring, supplemental instruction, counseling, the Spirit Pantry, advising, or myriad other campus resources, the peer mentors helped connect students with services that supported their transition to and persistence in college. Carolyn also demonstrated the importance of not only campus resources but for students in certain situations the knowledge and ability to link students with off-campus

counseling, for example. Carmen's theme of Hints to Keep Students on Track also showed the ways in which mentors could help to remind students of these resources, as well as deadlines students needed to remember.

In addition to the importance of linking students to these more technical or purpose-oriented resources, that data also highlighted the significance of the peer mentors' work in connecting students to new social networks. While this came through particularly strongly with Jillian and Getting Students Involved in Social Life, it was also a notable part of the themes just discussed as peer mentors informed mentees about and encouraged them to engage with events and groups on campus where they could develop personal relationships. Whether it be a campus ministry group, a sorority, or a homecoming concert, the peer mentors help students find groups and situations to build new relationships as part of a new support network. In the absence or diminished capacity of students' previous support systems, the peer mentors were able to facilitate an assortment of new connections from which first-year students could construct a new system of support to meet their individual needs, parts of which were designed specifically to address uniquely college-related challenges.

Bridging the Gap. Importantly, my breakdown of the data also indicated another important theme, while students are constructing those new social networks the mentors could serve as a temporary support system to aid mentee transitions. The peer mentors noted that as they moved into the spring semester some students decreased the frequency or even stopped scheduling regular meetings. The mentors spoke about how the first-year students needed them less at that point. This was confirmed most clearly in Jennifer's discussion of her relationship with Peter. She shared that especially in the first semester

when it came to meeting with her peer mentor, she "felt I needed to" because she was "stressed about like certain parts of school." By the time we spoke in the second semester, however, Jennifer shared that she had "kind of grown where I don't really. Plus, I have like other, like, friends or like people who I know… I can talk to as well." In the period when students were still constructing a more permanent support network, peer mentors functioned as someone students could talk to, a trusted source of advice, someone to remind them of critical deadlines, or a general resource to meet needs that arose. In serving as temporary supports, peer mentors helped students navigate the college transition until students developed more permanent interpersonal networks.

Strategies

The peer mentors also assisted first-year students in ways that corresponded to another aspect of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework by helping the students with strategies that mitigated the stresses associated with starting college. This includes both responses that modified the situation as well as ones that managed stress after it had occurred.

Responses that Modified the Situation. In the support of first-year students, I noted in the data that another way by which peer mentors provided assistance was by helping students develop tools that allowed the first-year students to better cope with the new challenges of college. This motif of skill development was a part of several of the mentor themes. For example, in Jillian's Showing Them What to Do, by showing students how to access online systems like financial aid or account information, Jillian enabled students to use those systems to improve their college experience. The same sort of approach was evident in Carmen's Hands-on Demonstration motif.

Carolyn's theme of using An Activity in the Mentoring Binder also connects with this part of the framework. By helping students hone their study skills or better manage their time, for example, Carolyn was helping students respond in a way that altered and gave them a better ability to control their situation. Because of her work with first-year students, they were better equipped to handle circumstances with less stress in the future. Peter's Empowerment theme also coincided with this area. By coaching students to take responsibility and supporting them as they learn to navigate relationships with roommates and professors, Peter was supporting the mentees' abilities to respond in ways that modified their situation. The peer mentors previously mentioned efforts to connect students to campus resources also indirectly connected to this, as many of those services also taught skills that enabled students to modify their circumstances. By these various means, the peer mentors helped first-year students learn ways in which they could exert control over their circumstances as they started college.

Responses that Helped to Manage Stress After it Occurred. In addition to helping students learn to modify their situations, the peer mentors also supported first-year student responses that helped manage stress. They did this first by being someone to whom students could "vent" or "rant." These were words used by the peer mentors to describe the ways in which students used mentors as a safe place to talk about difficulties they were facing. Providing a Place for Students to Rant was a key theme for Jillian, though it was present with all the mentors, and it was Peter who contributed the term "venting" to describe the phenomenon. My reading of the data indicated that these times of venting or ranting were an outlet that students used to mitigate stress. At one point a

peer mentor noted that they even used it among themselves to manage their own stresses associated with the peer mentoring job.

The data also indicated that emphasizing self-care with first-year students was an effective means by which peer mentors could help the students manage their stress. Within Carmen's Skill Coaching theme, developing student self-care was a significant area of focus. Jillian's discussion with Cassidy about getting outside to walk was also indicative of this emphasis on self-care. Furthermore, Carolyn reported that among the various activities in the mentoring binder, ones on self-care were among the more frequently used.

Summary

The data collected in this study demonstrated a variety of ways in which peer mentors assisted first-year students as they adjusted to college. The data also showed that many of these efforts aligned with aspects of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework as the peer mentors first helped students process or understand the novel college experience and then aided students as they formed new networks of support. In this, they both directly provided a short-term safety net for students and helped facilitate the development of longer-term support systems that allowed first-year students to better transition to college life.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

This study was designed to improve the understanding of the manner in which peer mentors aid the transition of first-year students into higher education. In this final chapter, I will discuss how the results of this research relate to the extant literature. In the course of the discussion, I intend to show how the results align with previous research about both peer mentoring and the use of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework as well as the ways in which the findings advance our understanding of peer mentoring. In addition, this chapter will consider the implications of this study and then suggest avenues for further research to build on what has been learned. Finally, I will offer conclusions to the chapter as well as wrapping up the whole study as a whole.

Discussion

I undertook this study to begin ascertaining the means by which peer mentors contribute to the successful college transitions of first-year students and in so doing address a gap in the current knowledge base. In this section, I will delve into the ways in which the findings of this study relate to the existing literature. As the literature review in chapter two showed, previous research has well established that peer mentoring is one among many interventions that can contribute to students' successful transition to higher educational institutions (Booker & Brevard, 2017; Hunter, 2006; Pino et al. 2012). However, knowledge about the means by which peer mentors accomplish this has remained largely underdeveloped (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). This discussion will consider the reported challenges first-year students at SRSU faced as they started college and tie that to the ways in which the peer mentors aided their transitions.

Furthermore, the review of the literature also demonstrated that while

Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) transition framework had previously been utilized

to understand the changes inherent in the transition to college (Patton et al., 2016), it has

frequently been employed within relatively narrow parameters often focusing on specific

populations within higher education (Byrd, 2017; DeVibliss, 2014; Foster; 2018).

DeVibliss (2014), for one, advocated the framework's use to understand the transition

experience of new college students. I will consider how the findings of this study line up

with the Transition Framework and its use with students starting college. I will conclude

the discussion section by addressing some other important findings from this study that

were not part of its initial focus.

Challenges for First-Year Students Starting College

The findings of this study support existing literature regarding the wide range of

challenges that first-year students encounter as they start college. Among these academic,

social, financial, and emotional struggles are common to students starting higher

education. (Clark, 2005; Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007). In the academic realm, first-year

students found SRSU to be very different from their high school experiences and

different even from dual enrollment. The difference in class schedule and an associated

need to learn to manage the increased amount of free time in a responsible way that set

aside enough time for studying was a common theme. Cassidy noted she had to spend a

lot more time studying. Pamela, who had taken considerable dual enrollment hours prior

to her first year at SRSU, still noted that classes were at least "a little bit more difficult."

Students were also surprised by the amount of information covered and the speed at

which classes moved, as Carolyn noted. These findings agree with what Ingram and

Gallacher (2013) and Zhang (2021), for example, discussed as being common experiences among students starting college. Some students also had difficulty learning to relate to professors and staff and sought guidance from peer mentors on topics like how to schedule an appointment or compose an appropriate email. The general academic environment was different enough that many students discovered that what had worked for them in high school was not adequate to succeed at SRSU.

In addition to adapting to a new academic landscape, many college students must also develop a new network of social connections to avoid being socially isolated (Leary & DeRosier, 2012). This task is further complicated by personal identity development which occurs in this timeframe for most students as well as the current social media environment (Patton et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2018). While many students might have had previously existing friendships or acquaintances that carried over to their start at SRSU, Jeremy's description of social life as "basically like starting over" seemed relatively commonplace. Jillian's comment about making new friends being a struggle for many new students is indicative of how Jeremy's sentiment did not reflect an outlier's experience. Because of the importance of first-year students making social connections, mentors shared how this was often a focus with their mentees early on as they strove to get students to meet new people at campus events or through student organizations. The social challenges encountered by first-year students at SRSU were largely consistent with and did not offer any notable additions to the extant literature.

In addition to social and academic challenges, the new students also had to overcome financial challenges as expected based on the previous research. As Clark (2005) noted, not only is access to adequate funding for college an issue but the processes

associated with financial aid can be confusing and present a barrier to students. In the years since Clark wrote, while changes may have been made to the financial aid process, this study suggested that those complications remain. As discussed previously in Chapter Four, both mentors and mentees shared difficulties understanding the process and navigating SRSU websites and portals associated with financial aid. Part of what enabled Jillian to guide new students through these processes and connecting with the correct offices was the experience she gained in having to teach herself those things even after completing a year at SRSU. She recounted having to interact with financial aid multiple times during the previous summer to update or complete paperwork. Carmen also shared that mentees often raised questions about these areas and Natalie elaborated on how important Carmen's help was when she shared that because Carmen was able to assist her Natalie ended up not having to wait three months for the next available appointment with financial aid.

Finally, as noted in the literature review, the transition to college can heighten existing or instigate new mental health troubles, a trend that has been increasing in recent years (Johnson et al., 2010; Kneeland & Dovidio, 2020). While none of the first-year students in this study reported issues that they felt would require professional intervention, both they and their peer mentors did share about a number of emotional and mental health issues students faced as well as ways in which mentors provided support to students. It should also be noted that, as Carolyn remarked, other first-year SRSU students who did not participate in this study had been using campus counseling services. Carolyn elaborated by indicating how widespread this issue was saying of the first-year

students in general, "I know there's been a lot of mental support and emotional support that have been needed."

Stress and the challenge of being away from home were commonly reported grounds for needing emotional support. Experiences of missing familiar relationships and experiences, including homecooked meals for Alexander or her pet in Natalie's case, contributed to homesickness and emotional discomfort among students. This led some students to return home every weekend, a tendency among first-year students reported by mentors and new students alike. Furthermore, while posing challenges in and of themselves, the social, financial, and academic concerns discussed above can all contribute to strain and emotional stress for students. Overall, the findings of this study related to the problems first-year students face as they start college comported with the existing literature.

Improving the College Transition

Due to the importance of a successful transition to college, as reflected in the existing research, higher educational institutions have invested considerable resources in improving this pivotal student experience (Dornan, 2015; Kerr et al., 2004; Nelson et al, 2012). Myriad approaches to improve student transitions have included new student programs, orientation programs, social support groups, tutoring, skill training, and various attempts to increase student engagement on campus (Apriceno et al., 2020; Gibney et al., 2011; Price & Tovar, 2014; Rodriquez et al., 2017). Importantly research has shown both that such programs can aid college transitions (Hunter, 2006) and that mentoring can be one of these effective interventions to support first-year students (Booker & Brevard, 2017; Pino et al. 2012). The results of this study confirm these

existing assertions while also beginning to illuminate how peer mentoring works to produce those positive results.

Affirming the Efficacy of Support Services

The results of this study upheld the importance and efficacy of services like tutoring, supplemental instruction, and skill training present in the literature (Apriceno et al., 2020; Hunter, 2006; Ingram & Gallacher, 2013; Leary & DeRosier, 2012). For example, Jeremy shared that he would likely have failed his anatomy class had he not received tutoring in that subject. Carolyn also shared how she informed students of Supplemental Instruction (SI) sessions and encouraged them to attend. Jeremy again affirmed the importance of this noting in his meeting with Jillian that he attended SI sessions on a weekly basis. Skill training was another important aid to the first-year students. Learning to manage their time, mitigate or manage stress, take more useful class notes, get involved on campus, as well as how to navigate important SRSU portals, offices, and relationships with employees were all discussed by participants as important factors in improving the transition of first-year students at SRSU.

What Peer Mentors Contribute to Support Efforts

Critically, however, this study demonstrated that peer mentors contributed to support efforts for first-year students in a couple of ways. First, the findings of this study showed how peer mentors can increase the effectiveness of existing services by helping connect students to them. The value of these services and the investment of colleges and universities in them is best realized when their utilization is maximized. While SRSU doubtless promoted these services in various ways, this study revealed that peer mentors played an important role in connecting students with the services that they needed. While

this study did not consider, or even attempt to do so, the reasons why other SRSU informational channels were not effective in getting students to utilize campus support services, the data did indicate that peer mentors were able to do so. Carolyn revealed that sometimes it was a matter of making students aware of specific services like supplemental instruction or counseling. In other instances, as Jillian and Carmen discussed, it was a matter of helping students connect with particular services and then helping to provide accountability to encourage their utilization.

Furthermore, the findings of this study showed in some cases where demand for certain services is high, peer mentors could more quickly address some questions and needs that students had. The instances of Jillian helping students with basic financial aid questions or Carmen showing Natalie how to access that information online were indicative of this. Natalie was able to get a faster response from her peer mentor than she would have been able to from the Financial Aid office. This led to a much more positive experience for her and also meant that the staff in that office were potentially able to dedicate time their time to other student issues. Likewise, Alexander finding adequate personal support from Peter meant that he did not feel the need to utilize the campus counseling center, a resource in high demand (Kneeland & Dovidio, 2020). Similarly, Natalie commented that just being able to talk to Carmen about things going on in her life was a valuable form of support. Importantly, however, the data did also demonstrate that the peer mentors seemed to recognize the limits of their capabilities and were prepared and able to pass students on to campus professionals when necessary. This was especially crucial when it came to a peer mentor being someone to whom a student could vent and

from whom they might receive emotional support versus a student needing professional counseling.

This function of the peer mentor also segues to a second finding of this study which indicated that peer mentors can be highly successful in training new students in some of the essential skills they need to succeed in college. Drawing on prepared materials like the mentoring binder, the training the peer mentors received, and aspects of their personal experience, the mentors in this study were able to instruct first-year students in areas such as time management, self-care, class registration, study skills, and even interpersonal relations. Notably, the first-year students found such instruction from the peer mentors to be helpful. Paula's experiences with starting a planner or adjusting her study methods based on Carolyn's guidance were examples of this. Similarly, when the mentors taught students how to make appointments, compose emails, or cultivate relationships with professors they were helping the first-year students develop fundamental skills essential to both their short- and long-term college success.

The mentors were able to do this in a setting where they could work with each student individually rather than in a larger group setting as might be provided by a campus office. Again, this provision of lower-level services by the mentors might have served to free up SRSU employees so they could handle more complex student needs and certainly seemed to streamline the learning process for the first-year students with whom they were meeting during the course of this study. When the mentors were able to provide this type of training the first-year students did not have to schedule an additional appointment or meet someone else to acquire the needed knowledge or skill. The findings of this study showed that peer mentors supported first-year students by both helping them

learn new skills identified as important in the literature directly and also facilitating connections to campus support services when needed.

Peer Mentors as Experienced and Trusted Guides

While one of the traditional hallmarks of mentoring relationships is a considerable age gap between the mentor and mentee, peer mentoring matches people who are much closer in age (Douglas et al., 2013; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). In this study, the mentors ranged from one to three years older than most of the mentees with whom they worked. Critically, it appears that due to the vast amount of change inherent in the college transition, the age gap traditionally associated with effective mentoring relationships may be less necessary in this setting. The first-year students seemed to affirm or at least perceive a substantial gap in relation to experience and institutional knowledge between themselves and the peer mentors and felt those differences meant the peer mentors could be effective guides despite their similarity in age. They also shared that they valued the know-how and understanding that the peer mentors were prepared to share with them. As a result, the first-year students were prepared to allow the mentors to shape their understanding of what it meant to be a college student as well as how they should go about that task.

One of the key ways in which the peer mentors helped guide first-year students was by helping them understand how being a student at SRSU was different from what they had experienced in high school as well as general expectations the new students might have brought with them regarding college life. This study concurs with previous literature that the divide between what students expect and the reality of college can be

significant (Carter, 2013; Foster, 2018; Tinto, 2012). Peer mentors in this study helped students adjust their thinking in a couple of key areas.

Understanding What it Means to Be a College Student

First, peer mentors helped students adapt to the considerable ways in which SRSU deviated from the previous educational experiences. Due to those differences, both peer mentors and first-year students noted that familiar ways of navigating their approach to their studies often did not translate well to SRSU. This aligns with the existing literature which notes how the ways in which classes are structured as well as the intellectual demands were very different from what students had previously experienced (Barnett et al., 2016; Ingram & Gallacher, 2013).

For example, due to greater emphasis on reading and larger amounts of material covered as well as a greater associated emphasis on taking useful notes in class, many first-year students had to rethink what it meant to be a successful student in college and what would be required for them to achieve their goals. Expectations about how much you had to study, how to go about studying, the need to go to the library, the relative academic abilities of your classmates, and the pace of learning are just some examples of different realities to which the first-year students had to reorient. Even the need to learn how to register for classes, as discussed by Carter et al. (2013), could be a more complicated ordeal than students might have expected as Jillian and Peter pointed out. Importantly, these challenges were still present, even if only to a lesser degree, for students who had been in dual enrollment programs and accumulated notable amounts of college credit already.

The college experience was markedly different from what many first-year students had been expecting and an important part of the work that peer mentors did to aid the transition of the first-year students were efforts to help redefine what it meant to be a college student and succeed in that endeavor. In this way the peer mentors seem to contribute powerfully to the socialization, "the process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization" (Gardner et al., 2007, p. 289), of the first-year students at SRSU. The peer mentors played an important part in helping students delineate what it meant to be a college student generally as well as an SRSU student in particular.

Your Life Changes More Than You Expect

In addition to life alterations directly related to their education, this study also agreed with the previous findings that have shown the breadth and depth of life changes associated with starting college (Bolle et al., 2007; Carter et al., 2013; Leary & DeRosier, 2012; Tinto, 2012). First-year students tended to need to recalibrate their thinking about to the degree to which starting college would change their day-to-day lives. Financial matters and the need to develop new social networks were two significant examples of life changes with which students were often forced to reckon.

Paying for it All. Monetary concerns and an associated need to find a job were new experiences for many students. Carter et al, (2013) pointed out that college is often a time when students begin to manage their own finances. Some students at SRSU had to work full-time while taking classes in order to cover college costs and expenses, as Carolyn noted. Pamela was an example of this as she worked 35 hours a week while

enrolled in 18 hours of classes. In her case she at least had some preparation for this having had an evening job in high school that went until 11 p.m. This meant she was accustomed to allotting considerable portions of her schedule to work while balancing her school work with this sizable time demand. Other students lacked such experience. Jennifer's difficulty finding a good on-campus job was another example of the challenges students faced related to work. Alexander's need to access the Spirit Pantry in order to have food to prepare for meals also revealed another component of the financial strains some students experienced as they started at SRSU. With the exception of connecting students with the food pantry or occasionally being able to offer advice about jobs, these were areas where the peer mentors could provide limited direct support, but they could and did listen to student concerns as well as offer encouragement, sympathy, or occasional advice.

Finding People with Whom and Places Where You Fit In. As Leary and DeRosier (2012) discussed one of the critical tasks for students as they start college is "developing social connections" (p. 1216) so they do not end up socially isolated. The networks which had been a part of their lives in high school are at best changed or diminished and are often left behind completely. As Jeremy shared, many first-year students at SRSU were essentially starting over socially. In this study, one way this often presented was in the form of students experiencing homesickness. First-year students and peer mentors both spoke about first-year students wanting to return home every weekend because they missed friends, family, pets, or just the familiarity of things once taken for granted like home-cooked meals. In some cases, these differences may have merely

resulted in feelings of missing what was familiar, though in other cases it related to having less predictability or stability in key parts of their life.

First-year students and peer mentors alike reflected on the importance of making friends and connecting to social groups like student organizations. In fact, this was one of the primary areas of emphasis for the mentors with their mentees early in the academic year. Jillian modeled this as she prioritized checking that Cassidy was meeting people and very intentionally helped Jeremy set goals in this area during her meetings with them. Similarly, Carolyn spoke about investing time with mentees coaching them in how to make new friends in college. Furthermore, the efforts of Carmen and Jillian to inform mentees of organizations and groups that might be a good fit for them were another means to aid the development of social connections among the first-year students.

In addition, however, the mentors' personal relationships with their mentees were also vitally important in facilitating student transitions. The degree to which Natalie valued her developing friendship with Carmen, the interest Jennifer felt that Peter demonstrated for her, and the readiness with which first-year students shared personal, even what seemed at times highly private, details of their lives with Carmen, Peter, Jillian, and Carolyn all signaled the importance of the mentoring relationship to the first-year students. One of the key insights from this study was the ability of peer mentors to temporarily meet some of the mentees' interpersonal needs while the students went through the process of developing new social connections. Given the importance the existing literature places on social connection (Leary & DeRosier, 2012; Tinto, 2013), the ability of peer mentors to temporarily fill this void for students while also encouraging

and helping facilitate the development of more lasting social bonds were a significant contribution to understanding how to aid first-year student transitions.

In these facets of the college transition experience, the findings of this study generally aligned with the existing literature while also contributing to the body of knowledge by showing how peer mentors can help students navigate the challenges inherent in starting higher education. My findings in this study at SRSU confirm that students starting college often do not comprehend the degree to which college will differ from their high school experience both academically and overall. It also affirms that peer mentors can be a useful form of support to improve student transitions. Additionally, however, it builds on these foundations by showing that peer mentors guided students and aided transitions when they 1) helped students rethink their expectations about college, 2) increased the efficacy of existing support mechanisms by helping connect new students to them, 3) at times provided easy access, low-level version some of those support services, 4) encouraged and supported the development of new social connections for their mentees, and 5) met the social needs of their mentees during the transition period.

Schlossberg's Transition Framework and First-Year College Transitions

While often used within relatively narrow parameters and focusing on specific populations within higher education (e.g., Byrd, 2017; DeVibliss, 2014; Foster; 2018) Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework has been previously utilized as a means to understand and analyze college transitions (see also Archambault, 2010; Bejerano, 2014 Karmelita, 2020; Turner, 2019). The findings of this study support the Framework's utility for providing a structure within which we can understand the transition experience of new college students. It allows for consideration of the nature of

changes students encounter as they start college and how they cope with those changes including variation within individuals. Perhaps because it is broad in how it frames transitions, Schlossberg's model seems applicable and adaptable to a variety of circumstances and populations as I illustrated in the literature review section of this dissertation. This does raise the potential question of whether it is so broad-based to be overly malleable and open to misuse. I think the study, as with others that have proceeded it, demonstrates the framework has enough specificity to be useful in structuring studies about college transitions and I therefore join DeVibliss (2014) in advocating its wider use for this purpose. In the following section, I will look at how the results of this study related to the Approaching Transitions and Coping with Changes (4s) phases of the Transition Model.

Approaching Transitions – Understanding Change and its Scope When Starting College

As discussed in Chapter two, Approaching Transitions, the first phase of the Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework focused on understanding the type(s) of change taking place. This study has showed that three parts of that phase make it particularly useful for understanding college transitions. First, the model is beneficial because if addresses how individuals may apprehend or experience the identically named change differently as well as how a person's understanding of the change they are experiencing may alter over time. The findings of this study showed that while all the new students were undergoing "the same" transition as first-year students starting college and there were considerable areas of similarity, there were also extensive substantive variations that meant they thought about and approached that transition in

different ways. For example, Pamela living at home and commuting meant that she did not deal with issues related to living in a residence hall in the way Jeremy and Cassidy did or missing home-cooked meals as was the case for Alexander. Likewise, Cassidy and Paula joining sororities early in their time at SRSU made for a different social environment from Jennifer or Natalie. Given the dramatically different experiences that can fall under the umbrella of first-year students starting higher education, the ability of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework to recognize and account for such diversity can be an important asset.

A second strength of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) model as it relates to college transition is that can account for the possibility that an individual's understanding of the change they are experiencing will change over time. In this study that was reflected in the first-year students' evolving understanding of what it meant to be an undergraduate at SRSU. The expectations the first-year students held about classes, academic work outside the classroom, free time, and being away from home, to name a few examples, morphed as they began to confront the reality of college life. This is in part why the functions of the peer mentors in helping to socialize the new students and assist their attempts to better understand what it meant to be a student were essential. It also demonstrated why the transitions framework's accounting for an evolving understanding of transition makes it useful with this population.

Finally, the framework can also be particularly useful in examining college transitions because it accounts for multiple simultaneous changes and how they can interact with one another. As previously discussed, one of the hallmarks of starting college is the considerable number of aspects of a student's life that can change. In

addition to adapting to a more rigorous and faster-paced academic environment, new social connections, different living arrangements, and taking on new personal responsibilities are just some of the alterations that may occur to students' lives. The capacity of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) framework to consider multiple changes and the ways in which said changes may interconnect, both positively and negatively, within the overall transition are a notable asset. For example, students' need to work in order to cover expenses would likely affect the amount of time they are able to spend studying or even their ability to access important supports like tutoring. The results of this study demonstrated and confirmed previous assertions regarding the utility of the Approaching Transitions phase of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework.

Coping with the Transition

The findings of this study also supported the existing literature's use of Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) transition framework as it relates to students learning to cope with the changes and stresses brought about by starting college. In the literature review, I discussed that the second phase of the transition model accounted for the fact that the resources an individual has immediately available and is able to cultivate in order to manage transition are likely to vary considerably. This included both mechanisms that modify the situation as well as ones that manage stress after it has occurred. The peer mentors helped students learn to modify their circumstances as well as cope with stress more effectively.

Responses that Modify the Situation. Another important facet of the mentors' work in helping the first-year transition to college life lay in teaching them skills they

needed to accomplish certain requirements in higher education. Whether it was learning to navigate various SRSU websites and portals or acquiring new study skills, the peer mentors worked to equip first-year students with tools to help them navigate SRSU successfully. In instances like websites, online systems like Spirit System, or the app for managing Dining Dollars peer mentors both informed students about the existence of these tools or, as was the case during Jillian's meeting with Jeremy, showing the new students how to use them. By teaching students about the existence of these tools as well as how to use them, the mentors aided first-year students in their ability to manage their college experience more successfully and efficiently. Essential tasks like registering for classes or completing financial aid paperwork became more manageable for first-year students after a peer mentored demonstrated or walked through those processes with them. At an institution the size of SRSU this could have some practical benefits. Given the long wait times students reported at some offices, the peer mentors teaching students how to use these resources streamlined the process for some students and potentially reduced the load in those offices allowing them to address more difficult issues instead. This therefore would seem to potentially improve students' experiences in several ways both directly and potentially indirectly for the student body as a whole.

In addition to teaching students how to navigate various digital platforms, mentors also taught or helped first-year students develop other skills that were important to college success and often life in general. These included things like time management, study skills, note-taking, and interpersonal skills. These were clear points of emphasis for the mentors and the mentoring program. SRSU's mentoring binder contains a range of

activities designed to develop these sorts of skills among students and their training covered several common and critical ones like time management.

As previously considered, a substantial change that first-year students must navigate is the difference in how college classes and studying are structured as compared to high school in addition to an associated increase in responsibility for students to manage their own learning. Rather than being in classes continuously for most of the day like high school, first-year students found they spent less time in the classroom and appeared to have more free time. However, as considered above, first-year students faced a variety of demands on their time, not least the common need to spend considerably more time studying than they had in high school. By teaching the new students to manage their schedules and set aside time for essential tasks like studying, work, etc. peer mentors helped the first-year students assert control of their lives and adapt to college life in ways that could prevent or reduce stress.

The mentors also helped the first-year students modify their circumstances by teaching them skills intended to improve their academic performance. Whether it was guidance on how to better take notes, study more effectively, or better prepare for tests, the mentors teaching the first-year students these skills changed the way the students were able to approach their academic pursuits. This not only better prepared them for their studies, but it also can help reduce stress associated with various academic tasks.

Furthermore, the mentors also aided the first-year students with the development of interpersonal skills. From easier interactions like learning how to write an appropriate email to a professor or how to seek assistance from a professor or staff member to potentially more thorny issues such as dealing with difficult roommates, the peer mentors

guided the students in how to handle these interactions. This knowledge of how to handle these interpersonal interactions is an important part of adapting to college and by helping them improve abilities the peer mentors played important roles in the successful transition of the first-year students. By these various means, the peer mentors helped first-year students learn the ways in which they could exercise control of their situation as they started college. Consequently, first-year students were better equipped to more effectively handle these types of situations, possibly with less stress, in the future.

Responses that Help Manage Stress. In addition to helping students learn to modify their situations, the peer mentors also supported first-year students by helping them learn to manage the stresses they experienced during their college transition. One way they did this was by serving as someone to whom students could "vent" or "rant." This is tied to the earlier discussion of peer mentors being a safe person to whom students could talk about things they were experiencing as part of starting college. Given the number of students who had lost or had diminished previous interpersonal support systems on which they previously depended, it makes sense that the first-year students would need individuals to whom they could express frustrations, concerns, or just share about what was going on in their lives. It was interesting to see the range of topics that mentors reported students discussing with them. While many of these such as roommate issues, class difficulties, trouble navigating processes at SRSU, etc. might be expected, conversations about boyfriends or girlfriends and family issues were perhaps more surprising. This does seem to indicate, however, that the peer mentors engendered high levels of trust with the first-year students to the point that they felt comfortable sharing very personal information.

The peer mentors also worked to help students develop ways of coping with stresses associated with starting college by encouraging the first-year students to develop practices of self-care. The female mentors seemed to emphasize this area more as it was a significant focus for Carmen and Carolyn. Jillian also modeled this practice in her meeting with Cassidy by encouraging her to take walks. Other examples of skills and strategies the peer mentors recommended to students included scheduling study breaks, keeping a good sleep schedule, spending time with friends, or even something as simple as going to Sonic to get your favorite drink. This is not an exhaustive list and the peer mentors indicated that their binder had numerous options that they could use with students. I would also note that this form of support was connected to helping students learn to manage their time for the mentors. A common refrain was that they encouraged the first-year students to dedicate adequate time to their studies but that they also needed to build time into their days for these types of self-care activities. In line with Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) transition theory this study showed that the peer mentors assisted the transition of the first-year students by helping them learn to mitigate stress as well as teaching them how to take control of their lives and college experiences in ways that could minimize stress in the first place.

Finally, I want to reemphasize one finding that does not tie to one specific portion of the transition model, the importance of the peer mentors in communicating information to first-year students. The first-year students consistently gave greater credence to information about campus events, programs, and dates when that was delivered to them by their peer mentors. In some cases, this was filtered based on specific students' interests, as was the case with Jillian's recommendations to Jeremy about

homecoming events. In many cases, however, it was simply information prepared by the

director of the mentoring program but distributed by the peer mentors through emails and

texts. Regardless the first-year students often paid more attention to those messages than

ones coming through other university channels.

How Peer Mentoring Supports Student Transitions – Advancing the Existing

Literature

I undertook this study to address what I perceived to be a significant gap in the

body of knowledge on peer mentoring in college, understanding the means by which peer

mentoring aids student transitions to higher education. I did so by studying four peer

mentoring clusters at SRSU. While I discussed them in the context of the existing

literature above, I want to list them here to centralize the findings of this study that

advance our understanding of peer mentoring before addressing one additional significant

finding of this study not tied to its original purpose. Peer mentors supported improved

college transitions among first-year students by:

1) Helping first-year students understand the changes associated with starting

   college.

2) Helping students build new social networks.

   a. The mentors helped students meet new people and connect to new

      groups.

   b. The mentors served as temporary social supports including providing

      safe places where students could share or vent while students built

      new, more permanent support networks.

3) Teaching first-year students skills that better prepared them to succeed in college

    a. Some of these skills such as study skills, time management, or how to manage your student account served to prevent student stress by enabling them to modify their situation.

    b. Other skills like self-care were focused on managing or relieving stress.

4) Connecting first-year students to existing campus support services

5) Communicating institutional information to first-year students

While there remains considerable opportunity to expand on these findings through further research, as will be discussed below, these results represent an important advance in our knowledge about peer mentoring among college students.

Young Men in College

At this point, while it was not a focus of this study, there is another theme that I discerned in the data which I think bears mentioning, at least briefly, because of the ways I believe it influenced this study. That topic is the engagement and performance of young men in college compared to young women. The struggles of boys and young men within education overall and higher education more specifically have become a significant area of discussion and study in recent years (Jensen, 2015; Reeves, 2022). Young women now enroll and graduate college at higher rates than their male counterparts (Reeves, 2022). In fact, "Almost every college in the U.S. now has mostly female students" (Reeves, 2022, p. 47). Another difference noted in the literature is that women are also more likely to pursue what Jensen (2015) classified as caring professions, a description that might be

applicable to the peer mentoring role. While this was not an area of focus in the study, I contend that the data from this study both correspond to these educational and vocational trends in society as well as perhaps being influenced by them.

To start with, the enrollment and graduation rates at SRSU that I previously discussed in the overview of the institution above aligned with what Jensen (2015) and Reeves (2022) described regarding higher education in America. Those studies found that at most institutions fewer men enrolled in college when compared to women and the makeup of the SRSU student body reflected the same reality. Importantly for this study, the makeup of the group of peer mentors at SRSU reflected those demographic trends, as did the composition of the participants in this study. Women constituted a sizable majority of those serving as peer mentors at SRSU as well as in the makeup of those who took part in this study. The participants' general perception of men's engagement at SRSU also aligned with these tendencies as first-year men were less likely to participate in peer mentoring or even respond to communications from their mentors. That only two of more than twenty peer mentors working in the program at the start of this study were men represents an even more pronounced manifestation of this trend. This was something that, Andrea, the director identified as a concern, and she was working to recruit more male peer mentors. In my conversations with the first-year students having a mentor of the same sex did not appear to be a notable concern. Natalie for example said, "For me, it doesn't too much matter." Likewise, Jeremy noted, "I don't think it really matters as long as a person's willing to listen." Most of the first-year students did not seem to care if their peer mentors were a man or a woman.

However, that may not be true of all students, and some students did seem to prefer having a mentor of the same gender with whom they could talk. Pamela for example stated, "So I think that it helps me having a female as my peer mentor, but it may not be the same for somebody else." This same preference for a mentor of the same gender might also be true of the young men starting at SRSU. If this is the case, then the makeup of the peer mentoring pool could pose a problem both in the short term and further down the line. In the short term, this could exacerbate an issue that some participants mentioned regarding the engagement of first-year men. In addition to the demographic makeup of this study reflecting lower male attendance and participation in higher education (Jensen, 2015; Reeves, 2022), the participants also shared how men seemed less likely to meet with their peer mentors. Given that this study confirmed the existing literature supporting the ability of peer mentors to improve student transitions and outcomes, the fact that men are less likely to avail themselves of this resource only serves to reinforce their struggles in college vis a vis women.

Peter reflected on this phenomenon when he shared. "The guys are definitely harder just to… connect with" and when it comes to meeting with them it is often challenging for the men to "just get there." In the longer term, given how the peer mentors seem to recruit future mentors from among first-year students who are active and engaged in the peer mentoring process, this underrepresentation of men as peer mentors could become a self-reinforcing cycle. While I do not feel confident making assertions in this area since only two of the seven new students were men and three out of the total of eleven participants were men it seemed essential to acknowledge and examine briefly. I will also return to this when considering the need for future research.

Implications

Drawing broader implications from qualitative research or even educational research in general can be difficult (Ercikan & Roth, 2014; Falk & Guenther, 2021; Norman, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2010). In fact, Polit and Beck (2010) pointed out that attempts to generalize run somewhat contrary to the general objective of qualitative inquiry where the aim "is not to generalize but rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases" (p. 1451). Furthermore, Falk and Guenther (2021) reminded us, the traditionally accepted thinking from the "methodological literature on generalizing from qualitative research is epitomized by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) still oft quoted, 'The only generalization is: there is no generalization'" (p. 1054). However, more recently there have been discussions about ways to transfer or apply the knowledge gained in qualitative studies to other settings (see for example Borgsteded & Scholz; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014; Onwuegbuzie & Leech; 2009; Treharne & Riggs, 2015). The three most common approaches are case-to-case transfer, empirical generalization, and analytical generalization though they are often not understood in a uniform manner (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014; Treharne & Riggs, 2015).

This study utilized case-to-case transfer and analytical generalization approaches to draw implications from the data. In case-to-case readers are able to look at the data and assertions of the study and decide whether and how it might apply to alternative settings (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014; Treharne & Riggs, 2015). In analytical generalization, the results of a case study are tied to extant theory as a way to make connections to other situations or groups (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014; Yin, 2018). For this study, the theory in

question was Schlossberg's (Anderson et al., 2021) Transition Framework. I have attempted to connect the experiences of the first-year students and the ways in which peer mentors aided their adjustment to college with the Transition Framework so that readers may consider the ways in which that framework connects the findings of this study to potential conclusions about peer mentoring helping first-year students in general. I did so my organizing the ways in which the peer mentors helped first-year students understand the changes they were experiencing within the approaching transitions portion of Schlossberg's Framework (Anderson et al., 2021) as well as by aligning the coping mechanisms I noted in my interviews and observations with the 4s phase of the model.

 With these caveats in mind, I offer some reflections on how this study might connect to other circumstances. Given that this study has begun to explore the hitherto under explored means by which peer mentors aid the transition of new students to college, it has important implications for both practice and theory.

 The first implication is that institutions looking to improve first-year student transitions can try to create peer mentoring programs that address some of the student needs by means identified in this study. While not all may have access to grant funding like SRSU, institutions could create smaller, focused programs based on the resources and people they do have or create a program using unpaid mentors. While creating peer mentoring programs is obviously not a new idea, a crucial contribution this study provides is the opportunity to begin focusing on specific strategies used by peer mentors that were demonstrated to help new students. To begin with, using peer mentors as mavens to help connect new students to campus resources is a relatively simple but potentially profound strategy. While institutions like SRSU and others almost certainly

try to make students aware of campus resources the timing or manner of that information

delivery may not be optimal. The ability of peer mentors to remind about certain

resources students when the need is current or help make a direct connection with those

campus offices and personnel could at the very least augment existing efforts.

Furthermore, this study has shown how peer mentors are able to function as a

support system for these students while they build their own new networks. Related to

this is the importance of helping students build those new networks. These can be made

points of emphasis for existing peer mentoring programs. Additionally, however, for

institutions that do not have existing peer mentoring programs, there may be alternative

ways to support new students in this regard. Other student leaders like Resident

Assistants or Orientation leaders, for instance, could be trained and asked to help students

in the short term while also helping them make connections that would become part of

the new students' longer-term support networks. While this would likely involve a

different interpersonal dynamic from the peer-mentor relationship considered in this

study, such an approach might have some transferability to other such student leader

positions.

This application of methods of peer mentoring support methods also need not be

limited to helping students build networks of support. Tutors could, for example, lead

sessions teaching study skills and not just cover course materials. As part of Residence

Life or Student Activities programming student leaders or staff could lead sessions on

self-care. There might also be opportunities for student leaders to implement the methods

identified in this study within student organizations. Even if they do not have peer

mentoring programs, institutions can consider innovative ways to utilize the methods the

peer mentors in this study employed within currently existing campus structures and networks.

Another important implication of this study relates to how colleges and universities communicate information to new students. The fact that the first-year students in this study were far more likely to heed the same information when it came from their peer mentor as opposed to other university channels highlights both a challenge and an opportunity. That students commonly do not pay attention to emails and other forms of communication coming from various offices and departments on campus likely comes as a surprise to few working in higher education. My personal experience as a university administrator and in dialogue with many other colleagues leads me to believe that this is an ongoing issue for many if not all institutions. Attempts to address this have included the use of texting and social media as ways to garner student attention. This study, however, suggests that another way to improve student engagement with announcements and other university information would be to have peer mentors send it. This could be a simple addition to existing information channels that seemingly has the potential to make communications more effective. Alternatively for institutions that do not have peer mentoring programs the use of other student leaders to help package or relay this information could prove advantageous.

Recommendations for Further Research

In addition to implications that flow from this study of the ways in which peer mentors aid the transition of first-year students, there are opportunities for further research to expand on areas this study began to elucidate. One stream of new research could seek to replicate this study with some variation while others could seek to build on

it in different ways. The materials provided in the Appendixes of this dissertation should facilitate relatively easy replication should other researchers decide to do so. First, it could be useful to replicate this study at the same institution over a few years. This would allow research to follow some of the same mentors with new mentoring clusters as they gained more experience while also adding new mentors and their clusters to compare the experiences of different peer mentors and associated first-year students. In addition, it might also be useful to get participants who did not find their peer mentoring experience to be helpful in the college transition process. While I tried to secure the participation of one such individual in this study, the student did not follow through in scheduling an interview. Collecting data from students who did not find peer mentoring to be advantageous to their college transition could provide an even more complete picture of what works and what does not with different first-year students.

Furthermore, since all of the peer mentors included in this study were paid, a significant area of additional research would be to replicate this study by examining peer mentoring clusters led by peer mentors who are volunteers. Many institutions may not have the resources to pay peer mentors, and this could affect which students are able or willing to serve as mentors in an institutionally run program like SRSU's. While all of the mentors in this study indicated they enjoyed their jobs, they might not have been willing or able to serve in that role or at the very least dedicate the same number of hours, up to 20 per week, were they not being paid for their work. Two of the mentors in this study specifically mentioned choosing between this position and other employment opportunities. Not paying peer mentors would likely lead to having to find more mentors to meet demand from first-year students as it seems probable that volunteers would be

less able to invest significant time and therefore meet with and serve fewer students. This combination of lack of pay as an incentive to recruit top students as well as the need for a greater number of peer mentors could lead to a drop in overall quality and impact the peer mentoring experience of first-year students. Studies looking at clusters led by volunteer peer mentors would be essential to ascertain whether these concerns are founded, ways to mitigate such concerns, as well as other ways in which the mentoring experience might be different when the mentors are not paid.

Another important option for further research would be to replicate this study at other types of institutions. One of the things this study demonstrated is that peer mentors can aid first-year students by helping them learn to navigate life in higher education. This is particularly important for students who are first-generation and otherwise lack the social capital to help them know what to expect as they start college. The differing demographics of other institutions may mean that students at some colleges and universities could potentially be less likely to need peer mentors or at least may want or need different things from a peer mentor. Replicating this study at more selective institutions as well as ones that are private instead of public could provide important contrasts and give a broader perspective of the range of ways and circumstances in which peer mentors can most effectively aid the transitions of first-year college students.

It would also be instructive to directly compare the experiences of students who worked with a peer mentor to those who did not. This could illustrate whether non-mentored students are able to find the same sorts of support through other channels on campus and the ways in which they do so if that takes place. This would also allow more direct comparisons of which approaches are most useful to students as well as potentially

identifying specific student characteristics that make students more likely to benefit from peer mentoring. This would again allow institutions with limited resources to target peer mentoring at students most likely to benefit from it while using other existing resources to foster connections with other new students.

In addition, given the struggles of male students in education generally and higher education more specifically it seems prudent to examine the degree, if any, to which peer mentoring can serve to address this problem. The young men in this study reported that their peer mentors helped them with their transition to college and in one case was instrumental in the student persisting through his first semester. However, this is of limited value when young men are less willing to engage with resources like peer mentors that can aid them in their educational pursuits. While some of the issues of educational attainment are related to differences in the brain development timelines between men and women, in general there is not a clear understanding of why these issues persist and exactly why young men are struggling (Jensen, 2015; Reeves, 2022).

Finally, one of the things I noted in the preparation of this study was the lack of validated quantitative instruments to study mentoring among college students. In order to gather data across a wider range of institutions and differing mentoring circumstances such an instrument would be useful. Quantitative data would also be a good supplement to the qualitative data from the study and any replications of it. The areas of support found in this study could be used as the basis to create and test such an instrument. While the study has made important strides in starting to reveal the ways in which peer mentors can support improved first-year student transitions and higher educational outcomes, there remains important work to be done to build on this foundation.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that peer mentors aid the college transition of first-year students by helping them understand the changes that transition entails, providing direct support to those students, and helping them develop new systems of support by connecting them to campus resources and individuals. This contributes to our knowledge of peer mentoring by providing starting points to help us understand why the peer mentoring relationship is effective in improving student outcomes. While there are many opportunities to build on and expand this work, this study provides an important foundation to establish some of the mechanics of how peer mentors improve the college transition of first-year students.

Appendix A

Observation Protocol 1 – Mentor Training

The questions below will guide me as I look for relevant data while observing mentoring training sessions.

Approaching Transitions

What types of things might first-time students expect as they start college?

What changes are the new students likely to experience that they might not have expected?

Support

By what means are the mentors trained and expected to provide support to the first-year students?

With what campus or campus resources are mentors made familiar with which they can connect their mentees as needed?

Strategies

Are the mentors trained in any coping strategies to aid their mentees?

Self

What information are the mentors provided to help them understand the incoming students?

Other

What other things do I observe that are significant, but I am not able to classify immediately?

Appendix B

Mentee Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a study about first-year students and how peer mentors impact their transition college. Transition, in this context, is about all the different life changes that might take place when a student starts college for the first time. If you complete this survey, you will be entered into a drawing for one of five $5 gift cards.

What is your gender? (Text box)

What is your racial/ethnic identity? (Text box)

Major (Text box)

Age (Text box)

I have experienced a lot of changes in my life as a result of starting college.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

What is your assigned mentor's name? (Text box)

I have met with my assigned mentor since the start of the school year. (Yes or no radio button).

My mentor has been valuable in helping me make the transition to college life.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

This study will also include interviews with select mentors and mentees. This would involve taking part in a couple of interviews and possibly allowing me to observe a session between you and your mentor.

I would be willing to be interviewed (Yes or no radio button).

I would be willing to allow the researcher to observe a meeting between my mentor and myself. (Yes or no radio button).

If you are willing to participate, please include you contact information below.

Name: (Text box)

Email or phone number: (Text box)

Appendix C

Mentor Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a study about first-year students and how peer mentors impact their transition college. Transition, in this context, is about all the different life changes that might take place when a student starts college for the first time.

What is your gender? (Text box)

What is your racial/ethnic identity? (Text box)

Major (Text box)

Age (Text box)

How many years, including this one, have you served as a peer mentor? (Radio button: 1,2,3)

Some of my mentees have experienced a lot of changes in life as a result of starting college.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

I have met with my assigned mentees since the start of the school year. (Yes or no radio button).

I have been able to help my mentees make the transition to college life.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

This study will also include interviews with select mentors and mentees. This would involve taking part in a couple of interviews and possibly allowing me to observe a session between you and some of your mentees.

I would be willing to be interviewed (Yes or no radio button).

I would be willing to allow the researcher to observe a meeting between my mentees and myself. (Yes or no radio button).

If you are willing to participate, please include your contact information below.

Name: (Text box)

Email or phone number: (Text box)

Appendix D

Observation Protocol 2 – Mentoring Program Events

- How do the mentors interact with the mentees?

- How do the mentors use this time with the mentees?

  o Are the mentors helping the mentees build relationships with others?

  o Are the mentors helping to connect the mentees to the University

  community?

- In what ways are the mentors able to support their mentees in this setting?

  o In what ways are the interactions between the mentors and mentees

  different than in the individual meetings?

  o What does this say about the ways in which the support the mentees in

  different settings?

Appendix E

Mentor Interview 1 Protocol

Why did you decide to serve as a mentor?

What has it been like mentoring first-year students?

What are the best parts?

What are some of the challenges?

What was your transition to college like?

What types of transition have your mentees been dealing with?

How do you go about helping them understand those changes?

How do you assess what mentees need assistance with?

Tell me about your relationship with mentee 1, 2, etc.

Are there specific areas that you have helped mentee 1, 2, etc. with their transition to

college?

In what ways have you been able to personally help?

What other individuals or resources have you been able to connect your mentee with to

aid their college transition?

Appendix F

Mentee Interview 1 Protocol

How is your first year of college going so far?

> What have been the best parts?

> What has been difficult or unexpected?

Briefly tell me a little about your relationship with your mentor.

Thinking back to your times before college, how did you handle change or transition in the past?

How would you compare transitioning to college to previous changes you have dealt with?

Tell me about your experience transitioning to college.

- What is different about your life now?

- What changes have had the biggest impact?

- What changes have been the easiest to handle? Why?

- What changes have been the hardest to handle? Why?

How have you handled those changes?

How do you feel the transition to college overall?

How has your mentor helped you understand the changes that have come with starting college?

How has your mentor helped you cope with the changes that have come with staring college?

What are some other people or resources that have helped you adjust to college life?

What role, if any did your mentor have in connecting you with any of those resources?

Do you feel like you have settled into college life at this point?

In what areas do you still feel like you are still adapting or in transition?

Appendix G

Mentee Interview 2 Protocol

It has been a few weeks since we talked. How have things been going since then?

What new things have happened since we last visited?

Please, update me on your relationship with your mentor.

How are you feeling about your overall transition to college now?

In what ways, if any, is your transition to college different than the last time we talked?

- o What has changed?

- o What parts of the college transition do you feel like you have made

  progress on?

- o What has enabled you to progress in those areas?

Have you noticed any new changes that are a part of starting college since we last talked?

What new things has your mentor done to help adjust to college since we last visited?

- o What new resources?

- o What new strategies?

Ask about any specific forms about support observed during the events or mentoring

session.

Did you attend any of the mentoring program social events?

If yes, what did you and your mentor do during those times?

If yes, in what were was attending those events with your mentor helpful to you?

Appendix H

Mentor Interview 2 Protocol

Now that you are well into the semester, how are things going with your mentees?

What have been some of the victories or good outcomes you have seen so far?

How would you say your mentees are doing with their transition now?

- How do you think that compares to the last time we talked?

Follow up questions specific to things they mentioned for each mentee in interview 1.

What new types of transition have your mentees been dealing with?

Are there specific areas that you have helped mentee 1, 2, etc. with their transition to college since we last spoke?

In what ways have you been able to personally help?

What other individuals or resources have you been able to connect your mentee with to aid their college transition?

Did you and your mentees attend any of the mentoring program social events?

　　If yes…

　　　　o　What did you and your mentees do during those times?

　　　　o　In ways do you thinks those events were helpful to your mentee?

　　　　o　What were you able to accomplish with your mentee in that setting that you have not been able to or might not be able to in your individual meetings?

Appendix I

Observation protocol 3 – Mentoring session

What types of things do the mentor and mentee discuss?

Are the mentors providing any materials for the meetings?

Are the meetings structed in a particular way or are they more free form?

Are there ways in which the mentor help shape the mentee's understanding of the college

transition?

What types of support is the mentor directly providing to the first-year student?

- o How does the mentee respond to those forms of support?

- o Does the mentor adapt if something is not working?

What other forms of support is the mentor informing the mentee about or trying to

connect them to?

- What is the mentees response to these efforts?

What types of strategies are mentors using or training the students to use in coping with

the changes they are navigating?

What other things do I observe that are significant, but I am not able to classify

immediately?

What is my overall impression of the session?

- Was it comfortable for the participants?

- What are the ways in which my observations may have impacted what took

  place?

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