

# PEER MENTORING AS A FORM OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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# ABSTRACT

## Peer Mentoring as a Form of Leadership Development

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### **Literature Review**

Mentors provide a wide variety of professional and social benefits that include orienting their mentees to new environments. With formal mentoring programs, the mentee's growth and success are often the measure of success. However, mentoring, like any other dyadic relationship, is an exchange of thoughts, feelings, and experiences between *both* parties. Mentors have as much of an opportunity, perhaps even more, to develop their skills in leadership, communication, and influence by investing their energy into their mentee's success. Despite the potential transformational power of effective mentoring, empirical investigation into the benefits mentors receive from mentorship is lacking.

### **Thesis Statement**

As peer mentoring has the potential to be a highly impactful learning experience for the mentees, I expect that the mentor will also learn and grow from the relationship. However, the benefits peer mentors sustain might also revolve around leadership development, reflection upon their own experiences, and performing a service for another.

## **Theoretical Framework**

I ground the work in the work around experiential learning (Eyler, 2009). Though most of this scholarship has focused on cooperative learning and internships, serving as a peer mentor also provides experiential learning opportunities. Thus, consistent with McCall (2004), I argue that engaging in the behaviors is an impactful mechanism for developing leadership skills.

## **Project Description**

Peer mentoring is a form of personal leadership often utilized within higher education systems, particularly in helping facilitate the transition of first year students to college life. However, whereas successful peer mentoring programs do exist, research on the benefits mentors receive is lacking (Ragins & Scandura, 1999). Hullabaloo U, A&M University's pilot peer mentoring program, represents a pairing of faculty members with peer mentors to teach college success strategies to small classes of first year students.

Participants ( $N = 181$ ) were peer mentors in the Hullabaloo U program. The sample included 136 women (75.1%) and 45 men (24.9%), and was racially diverse, with 31 Asians (17.1%), 9 Blacks (5.0%), 57 Hispanics (31.5%), 6 people who identified as multiracial (3.3%), 77 Whites (42.5%), and one person who did not provide racial information. Participants completed a questionnaire online, where they provided their demographic information and responded to items about their training to be a mentor, leadership development, and satisfaction with the Hullabaloo U.

## **Results**

The mean score of the peer mentors' leadership development was 5.72 ( $SD = 1.07$ ; range from 1.56 to 1.89) and significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale (4),  $t(170) = 21.08$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% confidence interval: 1.56, 1.89. Results of a series of one-way analysis of variance

tests indicated the types of training did not significantly influence leadership development. Finally, there was a positive correlation value of .73 ( $p < .001$ ) between a peer mentor's leadership development score and his or her satisfaction with Hullabaloo U.

### **Implications**

The results have implications for peer mentoring, experiential learning, and leadership development in the university context.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Overview

In the Introduction, I expand on the significance of mentoring relationships. Specifically, I detail how the dyadic nature of mentoring can positively influence both the mentee and mentor in their personal development.

## The Need for Mentoring

Historically, the term *mentor* originates in the ancient Greek myth *The Odyssey* and broadly represents “any caring, mature person who forms a one on one relationship with someone in need” (Dondero, 1997, p. 882). Levinson (1978) explained the significance of mentorship as “one of the most complex and developmentally important [relationships] a man can have in early adulthood” (pp. 97-98).

With this developmental perspective in mind, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 19.9 million individuals will attend colleges or universities in the Fall 2019 semester. Of this population, 12.5 million will fall under the age of 25 years old. In other words, a substantial part of the population attends college and, as young students, may benefit from mentoring relationships within a university context. Understanding the developmental needs of young college students previously mentioned, Tinto (1999) cited aspects of successful student learning, particularly first-year students, including “information/advice, support, involvement, and learning” (p. 5). He then called for the implementation of collaborative learning and learning communities within university cultures. Included within these communities are cultures that encourage high impact learning practices such as capstone projects, community-based learning, first-year seminars, undergraduate research, internships, and mentorship (Kuh, 2008). I primarily



focus on peer mentoring in helping first-year college students by “facilitating social adjustment” and helping develop “camaraderie among mentees” (Holt & Fifer, 2017, p.68).

### *Benefits for the Mentee*

Within the mentoring relationship, mentees can reap many benefits, both tangible and intangible. Peer mentoring, as opposed to faculty mentoring, appear more authentic because the “near-peer” has “recently navigated similar experiences” of challenging course work and adjustment to an unfamiliar environment (Andre et al. 2017, p.2). Colvin and Ashman (2010) explained how mentors serve mentees by acting as a “connecting link, peer leader, learning coach, student advocate, and trusted friend” (p. 125). In other words, the mentor orients mentees to the unfamiliar campus, serves as a role model, provides advice for academic success, acts as a mediator between the mentees and the professor, and facilitates supportive relationships. The elements of peer mentoring contribute to Tinto’s vision of university-level learning communities.

These benefits noted, peer mentoring, being a unique relationship among individuals, offers more than the benefits Colvin and Ashman (2010) detailed. A study of peer mentoring of Ohio State University (OSU) faculty women in higher education STEM programs examined some of these benefits. The researchers found that peer mentoring circles provided opportunities for the mentees to network, improved their perceptions of a supportive university, and increased the likelihood of them staying at OSU (Thomas et al. 2014). In addition, peer mentoring in a classroom setting, as described by Kuh (2008), allows for mentees to receive a consistent flow of feedback, further engaging them in high impact learning.

### *Benefits for the Mentor*

Benefits the mentor draws from the relationship has received comparatively less attention in research, particularly within the university peer mentor population. Colvin and Ashman (2010)

cited peer mentors as having the opportunity to develop relationships and “support students” while also “reapplying concepts to their own lives” (p. 127) that were taught in the peer mentored academic success classes. Schmidt et al. (2016) concluded that peer mentors of women in higher education institutions gained a level of personal satisfaction in making a difference for someone through encouragement.

In addition to this, the mentors cited the experience as reflective and informative to understanding the difficulties of women building careers in higher education research settings. Andre et al. (2017) claimed peer mentors developed a sense of ownership over their program by organizing events to help orient first-year medical school students that included mock interview nights, social events, retreats, and how-to guides. In a study of Australian peer mentors at Curtin University, the researchers observed that peer mentors took pride in the role and used their own experiences to further develop empathy for their mentees (Beltman & Schaeben, 2017).

Skills within successful peer mentoring, such as flexibility, supportiveness, self-awareness, personal reflection, and emotional engagement, contributes to the activity’s status as an “effective vehicle for leadership development” (Comte & McClelland, 2016, p. 319). The University of Texas developed a student success initiative called The Leadership Network to help create positive minority college student experiences. Senior Vice Provost Dr. David Laude addressed first-year students, saying, “Look to your right, look to your left...you are looking at the leadership of the state of Texas” (p. 92). As their program relies heavily on peer mentors, understanding what type of leaders produced is central to evaluating the benefits peer mentors receive.

## **Purpose of the Study**

I created this study with the intention of understanding how peer mentors may benefit in leadership development and what satisfaction they may gain from peer mentoring relationships with first-year students.

# CHAPTER I

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Overview

Within the literature review, I describe how the Theory of Experiential Learning, the theoretical framework of this thesis, connects to leadership development. I draw parallels between the process of experiential learning and the peer mentors for Hullabaloo U, Texas A&M's new program for first-year students. I then propose three research questions that explore how a peer experiential preparation may influence their leadership development and satisfaction with the Hullabaloo U program.

### The Theory of Experiential Learning

Today, college degrees are not the only thing that distinguish individuals in the workforce. As Selingo (2016) argued, teenagers and young adults need impactful, real world experiences in junction with a college degree to secure jobs. As such, understanding the various definitions and components of experiential learning prove important in developing successful students beyond college. Boydell (1976), explained that experiential learning consists of the “meaningful discovery” that gives the learner opportunities to redefine their perceptions about the world (p. 19). Eyler (2009) explained the experiential theory as when the learner “interacts with the world and integrates new knowledge into old constructs” (p. 24).

Kolb and Kolb (2017) proposed that experiential learning as a cycle with four different modes of learning. *Concrete experience* describes the “here and now” of learning and consists of sensory information received by a learner from the environment. Examples of concrete experience include high impact education practices, such as service learning, internships,

undergraduate research, and study abroad trips (Kuh, 2008). Note that concrete experiences are not limited to this list, but only require that the learner grapples with challenging assignments, are exposed to new people, go through hardships, or experience significant personal events (McCall, 2004). *Reflective observation* allows for the learner to accrue meaning from the concrete experience and use the knowledge to help inform future experiences (Dewey, 1933). From this, a student creates theories about the information and draws connections in *abstract conceptualization*. Finally, *active experimentation* describes how the student applies the knowledge in their own lives. With the experiential learning cycle, it is important to note that all four modes of learning are experiences in themselves. Furthermore, engaging in all four actions results in full cycle learning and is the most powerful form of learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

On college campuses, the experiential learning cycle can take on many different forms with varying results. As McCall (2010) explained, experiential learning is highly individualistic, with learning dependent on prior experiences, knowledge base, learning style, and context of the education. Eyler (2009) cited three of the most common forms of experiential learning as cooperative learning, internships, and service learning. Within cooperative learning, students divide their time between university studies and paid work, allowing them to engage in education while simultaneously gaining work experience. Internships with companies give students the opportunity to meaningfully apply their knowledge in the real world and can enhance their subsequent academic performance (Binder et al. 2015). Service learning integrates community service and learning, working off the assumption that the relationship improves the quality of both (Eyler, 2009). However, the application of experiential learning reaches outside of the strictly academic sphere and into other areas of development such as leadership.

## *Experiential Learning and Leadership Development*

McCall (2004) explained that “experience can be used more effectively in organizational settings to develop leadership talent” (p. 127). In a corporate setting, this helps ensure that individuals are groomed properly to take over executive positions in the company. Furthermore, he emphasized that, because of the complexity involved in successfully leading companies, leadership development is a *process* that must occur over an extended time.

Komives et al. (2005) developed this observation further by proposing a grounded theory for leadership identity development that centered around how individuals engaged in experiences. Within the model, the researchers defined six stages to describe a college student’s leadership identity formation. The first stage consisted of *developing self-awareness* of leadership qualities. Researchers cited that this could be accomplished relationally, such as when parents or friends pointed out characteristics specific to the developing leader and provided encouragement to him or her. From this point, the second stage was defined by *exploration* and *engagement* as the developing leader sought out groups to participate in, often with unfocused involvement. However, with his or her increasing amount of organization participation, the developing leader began observing the leaders of the organization as the ones who engaged in leadership activities in stage three of the grounded theory. Because of this identification, the students became more intentional within their groups, while retaining a leader-centric viewpoint. In other words, students recognized the importance of the leader in their organization and attributed the success of that organization to the specific leader’s actions and influence. The fourth stage began with the realization that leadership is relational in nature and not limited to individuals who hold formal leadership roles and responsibilities. As such, the fourth stage is dubbed as the *leader differentiated* stage, and is marked by the developing leader recognizing

and using his or her influence to benefit the group, regardless of his or her status. Understanding this, the developing leader moved into the fifth stage as they began to express generativity towards others, seeking to give back by sharing their passions with the larger community. He or she did this by a variety of means, such as helping train younger members for leadership opportunities in their organizations, engaging in mentorships as a mentor, and performing other forms of service. Finally, the sixth stage described the integration of the leadership identity into daily self-identity. Leaders who had achieved this stage viewed leadership as an everyday thing and were confident that they could work well in groups. In the model, experiential learning served as a vehicle for the leadership identity development as each stage was marked by either an event of the individual or reflection of an event.

However, simply providing experiences to an individual does not necessarily entail their further leadership development. Instead, it only represents a piece. Priest et al. (2018) concluded that smooth transitions from one stage of leadership to the next benefited by the facilitation of a mentor or coach. As Kolb's learning cycle demonstrates, individuals must have an opportunity to reflect and find meaning within the experience in order to learn. Supporting this line of thinking, Ligon et al. (2011) concluded that mentors may serve in "bridging the gap between experiences and learning" (p. 306).

### **Hullabaloo U and Peer Mentoring**

Tinto (1999) first spoke of the need for universities to cultivate learning communities of first year students to improve retention in college. Following Tinto's reasoning, Hullabaloo U is a first-year experience course created to help students successfully transition into college.

Understanding that class size can influence the academic success of first year students

(Raimondo et al. 1990), Hullabaloo U places class size caps of 25 students in each section to help facilitate discussion and community.

Hullabaloo U's curriculum places emphasis on developing skills to help first-year students succeed in college. Topics include wellbeing, effects of alcohol, academic success strategies, healthy relationships, diversity, self-awareness, and major exploration. Instructors, who consist of recruited full-time staff or faculty member of Texas A&M, create the lesson plans in collaboration with the peer mentor. Also, instructors must make themselves available to their students to develop healthy relationships, and communicate clear expectations. To help ensure the quality of the program, they attend two training sessions before their class's start date in the fall.

In addition to the two workshops, instructors are also supplied with a peer mentor to help facilitate the course. The peer mentors apply to participate in the program and must remain in good standing with Texas A&M. While the peer mentors and instructors share the responsibility of developing lessons, peer mentors differ in that they are required also to engage in a one-on-one meeting with every first-year student in their section during the fall and spring semesters.

Going into their first year, students face several challenges that require them to adjust their lifestyles and habits. As such, the one-on-one meetings help to develop supportive and safe relationships to make student's transition manageable and improve retention for the university. This element of safety and community is enhanced by peer mentors who are required follow up with any students who miss the weekly class and guide them in finding appropriate university-provided resources. Finally, as peer mentors are an integral part of the program, they are required also to attend a training retreat with their paired instructor.



Among the benefits marketed to potential peer mentors at Texas A&M, Hullabaloo U claims to help develop critical thinking, intercultural competence, collaboration, and facilitation skills. If properly cultivated, each of these skills influences the development and competence of a leader. Jenkins and Cutchens (2011) elaborated on how critical thinking is inherent to leadership, as one must “evaluate assumptions” before attempting to challenge them, “accept, internalize, and apply constructive criticism,” and “ask questions” while taking measures to listen (p. 12). In addition, the researchers explained how open-mindedness and flexibility are assets to a leader as they “include the ability to recognize and accept the developmental stages of others” (p. 11) and “engage followers in a manner that is relational and ethical” (p. 12). Intercultural competence, as defined by Penn (2011), is “effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations” (p. 66). At Texas A&M University, in the Fall of 2019, 41.6% of the student population identified as international or racial minority. Understanding this, Hullabaloo U peer mentors will, most likely, encounter diverse cultures that require them to learn new ways of interaction.

These two skills help to strengthen how the peer mentors facilitate the Hullabaloo U course and collaborate with the instructor and first-year students. Whereas Hullabaloo U was created with first-year students in mind, it also serves as an experiential learning experience for the peer mentors. In many ways, peer mentoring takes the form of an internship. Kuh (2008) described an internship as a high impact learning practice that provides “students with direct experience in a work setting” with the “benefit of supervision and coaching” (p. 11). Where the more senior students may not engage with younger students in a leadership capacity, peer mentors must help first-year students’ success by advising them in their various problems, providing suggestions, and connecting them to university resources. In addition to this aspect of

Hullabaloo U, the program also requires that the instructor and peer mentor meet for a weekly one on one meeting. Whereas the content and productivity of the meeting largely depend on the individuals involved, committing to weekly meetings does open space for peer mentors to receive feedback from the instructor and reflect on their methods. With this structure, the peer mentor's role transforms into an internship with an emphasis on cultivating leadership skills. Given this background, the first research question guiding the study was:

**Research Question 1:** How does participation in Hullabaloo U influence the peer mentors' leadership development?

The peer mentor and mentee involved determine the success of the overall mentoring relationship. As both parties bring unique experiences and expectations to the relationship. Understanding the notion that peer mentors may improve a first-year student's college experience, it is important to prepare peer mentors to facilitate positive and healthy relationships. However, research on effective peer mentor training programs lacks consistency across higher education institutions. Individual universities have created unique preparatory programs for peer mentors from a variety of resources, influencing how the peer mentors develop mentoring relationships and assume leadership responsibilities.

At Hullabaloo U, peer mentors attended a required one-day training before the beginning of the fall semester. In addition, the peer mentors received periodic direction from the staff member responsible for the course. Beltman and Schaeben (2012) described a similar process for training peer mentors. Through their participation in the training, peer mentors became familiarized with the program, reviewed university resources first-year students might need, and developed competencies in cultural diversity, sensitivity, and student development. Peer mentors also received with a "Mentor Handbook and various printed and online resources" (p. 35).

Other programs, such as the Veritas Program described by Andre et al. (2017), elected to create a more intensive course for peer mentors. Within the year-long mentors in medicine (MiM) elective course, peer mentors attended meetings on a range of leadership development topics such as authentic leadership, constructive feedback, and decision making. After each discussion, peer mentors wrote reflections and evaluated how the knowledge they learned could improve their own mentoring styles. In addition to this, peer mentors completed a self-directed “Veritas advancement and improvement project” over the year. Smith (2017) specifically mentioned the importance of “providing consistent, ongoing, high-quality training” (p. 88) for peer mentors in the University Leadership Network (ULN) peer mentoring program at the University of Texas. The peer mentoring training centered around guidelines set by the College Reading and Learning Association. Two day-long training sessions were given at the beginning of each semester, supplemented by weekly, hour-long mentoring training during the semester. In total, ULN peer mentors were required to attend up to 25 hours of training and engage in 50-75 hours of face-to-face mentoring experience.

Understanding the plethora of different strategies for preparing peer mentors, the second research question guiding the study was:

**Research Question 2:** What is the relationship between pre-experiential learning training and leadership development?

Benjamin Franklin observed the efficacy of experiential learning with the quote, “Tell me, and I forget. Teach me, and I remember. Involve me, and I learn.” In respect to leadership, academic peer mentoring may serve as a form of involved leadership development. Where other college students may attend events centered around learning about leadership, peer mentors are required to directly participate in leadership by intentionally choosing their words and actions to

guide first year students. Understanding the nature of a peer mentoring job description, peer mentors have the opportunity to develop skills such as self-awareness, communication, influence capabilities, and leadership (Schmidt & Faber, 2016). This development, assuming the peer mentor does experience growth in skills, may correlate to a higher satisfaction rate for peer mentors in the Hullabaloo U program.

*Student satisfaction* represents a measurement of a student's attitude in regards to their educational experience (Elliot & Healy, 2001). Hartman and Schmidt (1995) found that this rating was contingent upon the "perceived quality" of the university's performance and "perceived outcomes of that performance" (p. 214). Kong and Yan (2014) utilized this definition to link professional development that drew on experiential learning theory to greater career competencies. In plainer terms, a higher learner satisfaction among the participants corresponded with greater career development. With peer mentors, higher degrees of perceived self-improvement in leadership skills, may lead to higher satisfaction with Hullabaloo U.

Where a peer mentor's satisfaction is not the primary goal of Hullabaloo U, it may play a role in its success. Peer mentors who are dedicated to improving their leadership capacity and cultivating skills from the program are more likely to be influential for first year students. As such, the third research question guiding the study was:

**Research Question 3:** What is the relationship between leadership development and satisfaction with Hullabaloo U?

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### Overview

In the Methods, I break down and describe different populations within the Hullabaloo U peer mentor survey participants. I also include a description of measures and procedures for administering the survey.

#### Participants

Participants included 181 peer mentors at Texas A&M University. Women held a majority of 75.1% ( $n = 136$ ), while men consisted of 24.9% ( $n = 45$ ). Peer mentors ranged in age from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 22, with a mean of 20.02 ( $SD = .93$ ). The plurality of respondents (46.1%), reported being the class of 2022. The class of 2021 represented the second-greatest group, with 30.4% of the respondents. Finally, 23.2% of the respondents reported being the class of 2020. Breaking down the respondent pool by race, 42.8% ( $n = 77$ ) of the peer mentors reported being White. Hispanics were the next largest demographic group, with 31.7% ( $n = 57$ ) of the sample. Asians consisted of 17.2% ( $n = 31$ ) of the sample, while Black individuals represented 5.0% ( $n = 9$ ). The smallest ethnic group consisted of multiracial individuals, numbering 3.3% of the sample ( $n = 6$ ). Of the 181 peer mentors, 36.7% answered that they were a first-generation college student. The largest group of respondents, 45.6% out of the 180 peer mentors, came from the College of Science.

In Table 1, I provide a full overview of the demographic information.

Table 1

*Peer Mentor Demographics*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Women	136	75.1%
Men	45	24.9%
<b>Race</b>		
Asian	31	17.1%
Black	9	5.0%
Hispanic	57	31.5%
Multiracial	6	3.3%
White	77	42.5%
<b>Age</b>		
18	1	0.6%
19	60	33.1%
20	67	37.0%
21	39	21.5%
22	13	7.2%
<b>College</b>		
Agriculture and Life Sciences	16	8.8%
Mays Business School	10	5.5%
Education and Human Development	11	6.1%
Engineering	11	6.1%
Geosciences	11	6.1%
Liberal Arts	18	9.9%
Public Health	3	1.7%
Science	82	45.3%
Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences	17	9.4%
Transition Academic Programs	1	.6%
<b>Class</b>		
2020	42	23.2%
2021	55	30.4%
2022	83	45.9%
<b>First Generation</b>		
No	114	63.0%
Yes	66	36.5%

## Measures

Peer mentors completed a survey posted on Qualtrics (see the Appendix for a list of all items). The survey consisted of demographical questions, including gender, race, and age. In addition to this, peer mentors reported their class year, what college they associated with, and whether they were a first-generation college student.

Participants reported the extent of peer mentoring training they received before assuming a peer mentoring role. In total, there were eight items, all of which was based on feedback from Undergraduate Studies—the office that helped facilitate Hullabaloo U and the peer mentor training. These items included topics such as the definition of mentoring, benefits of mentoring, the need for mentoring, boundaries, motivating students, reporting and referrals, responding to classroom/behavioral issues, and learning outcomes for the program. If the peer mentor received further leadership development training not listed, they could choose to describe their training in a comment box.

The survey continued by asking the peer mentors to reflect and report whether being a Hullabaloo U peer mentor had influenced their leadership development. Based on definitions of leadership (see Chelladurai, 2012), six items were developed: “being a peer mentor has helped me develop new leadership skills;” “I have learned how to motivate others over this semester;” “my skills at influencing others have developed as a result of being a peer mentor;” “being a peer mentor has *not* impacted my leadership abilities;” and “as a result of being a peer mentor, I have learned how to help people work toward a common goal.” Participants rated each item on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The reliability was acceptable ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

The last section of the survey asked peer mentors to identify whether, in general, had satisfaction with being a peer mentor, if they liked the job, or if they were dissatisfied with the

experience. Questions were adapted from Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh's (1983) scale (e.g., "all in all, I am satisfied with being a peer mentor"). Participants rated each item on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The reliability was acceptable ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

### **Procedures**

To conduct the survey, researchers sent out a mass email to the 350 peer mentors within the Hullabaloo U program. Peer mentors who chose to participate in the study by filling out the survey were entered into a raffle to win 1 of 4 \$100 Amazon gift cards. The initial invitation was sent on November 13, 2019, with follow-up reminder sent on November 18, 2019. The final sample included 181 participants, for a 52% response rate.



## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### Overview

In the results section I explain what statistical tests I utilized to analyze the peer mentor survey responses and the results of the test. The analyses of the data are organized to reflect the three research questions. Finally, I included supplementary tests to examine how the demographic and gender of a peer mentor may relate to their leadership development and satisfaction with Hullabaloo U.

#### Testing of the Research Questions

With the first research question, I asked: How does participation in Hullabaloo U influence the peer mentor's leadership development? The mean score was 5.72 ( $SD = 1.07$ ). I tested this research question by way of a one-sample  $t$ -test, where I statistically compared the mean score of Leadership Development with the midpoint of the scale (4). Results showed the mean difference (1.72) was statistically significant,  $t(170) = 21.08, p < .001$ , 95% confidence interval: 1.56, 1.89. Thus, the mean score for Leadership Development was significantly above the midpoint of the scale.

With the second research question, I asked: what is the relationship between pre-experiential learning training and leadership development? Table 2 provides the frequencies for each of the training components.

Table 2

*Frequency Table of Peer Mentor Training*

			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Mentor Training	Valid	Received	174	96.1	96.7	96.7
		Not Received	6	3.3	3.3	100.0
		Total	180	99.4	100.0	
	Missing	System	1	.6		
	Total		181	100.0		
Definition		Received	154	85.1	85.1	85.1
		Not Received	27	14.9	14.9	100.0
		Total	181	100.0	100.0	
Need		Received	135	74.6	74.6	74.6
		Not Received	46	25.4	25.4	100.0
		Total	181	100.0	100.0	
Learning Outcomes		Received	152	84.0	84.0	84.0
		Not Received	29	16.0	16.0	100.0
		Total	181	100.0	100.0	
Benefits		Received	48	73.5	26.5	73.5
		Not Received	133	26.5	73.5	100.0
Motivation		Received	147	81.2	81.2	81.2
		Not Received	34	18.8	18.8	100.0
		Total	181	100.0	100.0	
Boundaries		Received	162	89.5	89.5	89.5
		Not Received	19	10.5	10.5	100.0
		Total	181	100.0	100.0	
Reporting		Received	146	80.7	80.7	80.7
		Not Received	35	19.3	19.3	100.0
		Total	181	100.0	100.0	
Behavior Issues		Received	154	85.1	85.1	85.1
		Not Received	27	14.9	14.9	100.0
		Total	181	100.0	100.0	

I examined research question two by performing a one-way ANOVA test, the results of which are listed in Table 3. To account for family wise error associated with running multiple statistical tests, I introduced a Bonferroni correction value, found by dividing the normal statistical measure of significance (.05) by the number of tests run (8). As such, I considered the relationship between pre-experiential training and leadership development as a peer mentor statistically significant if the  $p$  value was below .006. As seen in Table 3, after applying the Bonferroni correction, there was no relationship between training prior to the semester, and perceived leadership development resulting from the peer mentoring.

With the final research question, I asked: what is the relationship between leadership development and satisfaction with Hullabaloo U? I addressed the third research question by running a Pearson correlation test between a peer mentor's leadership development and their satisfaction with Hullabaloo U. This gave a positive value of .726 ( $p < .001$ ).

Table 3

*ANOVA Table*

		Leadership Development		F	P
		Mean	SD		
Definition of Mentoring				.360	.954
	Received	5.74	1.09		
	Not Received	5.60	.97		
	Total	5.72	1.07		
Need for Peer Mentoring				4.50	.035
	Received	5.82	1.01		
	Not Received	5.42	1.19		
	Total	5.72	1.07		
Learning Outcomes for the Program				1.85	.176
	Received	5.77	1.06		
	Not Received	5.45	1.11		
	Total	5.72	1.07		
Boundaries and Appropriate Behaviors with Students				1.90	.170
	Received	5.76	1.04		
	Not Received	5.38	1.33		
	Total	5.72	1.07		
Benefits of Mentoring				7.55	.007
	Received	5.85	1.04		
	Not Received	5.35	1.06		
	Total	5.72	1.07		
Motivating Students				1.44	.231
	Received	5.77	1.06		
	Not Received	5.52	1.12		
	Total	5.72	1.07		
Behavior Issues				5.52	.020
	Received	5.80	1.03		
	Not Received	5.24	1.18		
	Total	5.72	1.07		
Training Reporting				5.19	.024
	Received	5.81	1.06		
	Not Received	5.32	1.00		
	Total	5.72	1.07		

## Supplemental Analyses

I also conducted additional analyses, beyond those to examine the specific research questions. First, I examined the degree to which the accumulation of training was associated with leadership development. Though no single form of training was linked with leadership development, it is possible the accumulation of such activities is. To do so, I computed a Total Training variable, representing the sum of training opportunities. The values ranged from 0 (for peer mentors who did not receive any training) to 8 (for peer mentors who received all 8 dimensions of training).

Table 4 provides an overview. Most of the peer mentors ( $n = 96$ , 53.0%) participated in training that covered all eight topics. This means, though, that 47% ( $n = 85$ ) engaged in training that did not cover all topics.

Table 4

<i>Training Topics</i>		
Number of Training Topics	Frequency	Percent
No Training	9	5.0%
1 Topic	0	0.0%
2 Topics	4	2.2%
3 Topics	2	1.1%
4 Topics	12	6.6%
5 Topics	15	8.3%
6 Topics	23	12.7%
7 Topics	20	11.0%
8 Topics	96	53.0%

I then computed the correlations among Total Training, Leadership Development, and Satisfaction. Results show that as the number of topics covered in training increased, so too did Leadership Development ( $r = .20, p = .008$ ) and Satisfaction ( $r = .19, p = .01$ ).

I also examined the role of demographic characteristics on Leadership Development and Satisfaction. I first performed two one-way ANOVA tests to discover the statistical significance of a peer mentor's race and both their leadership development and satisfaction; these findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Race ANOVA*

	Leadership Development				Satisfaction			
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
			2.73	0.03			.90	.47
Asian	5.68	1.07			6.25	0.71		
Black	6.43	0.64			6.57	0.50		
Hispanic	5.88	1.11			6.24	1.17		
Multiracial	6.50	0.52			6.72	0.44		
White	5.50	1.05			6.08	1.12		

From the results of the one-way ANOVA test, I found a significant statistical difference in the category of leadership development. While the ANOVA test reveals the presence of statistical differences between the variables, it does not reveal which variables are statistically different. As such, I performed a post hoc test to determine this piece of information. However, the post hoc tests did not reveal any statistically significant results.

In addition to the ANOVA with regard to the peer mentor's race, I examined the relationship gender may have with the variables of leadership development and satisfaction with

Hullabaloo U as a program. From the ANOVA test, I found that leadership development and satisfaction both had statically significant *p* values as summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

*Gender ANOVA*

	Leadership Development				Satisfaction			
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
			15.97	.000			8.53	.004
Woman	5.90	0.84			6.33	0.81		
Man	5.19	1.46			5.80	1.51		

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Overview**

In the following section, I discuss several implications of the peer mentoring survey results. First, I begin by restating the purpose of the study and explaining the results of the peer mentoring survey and analysis. I then link my study to experiential learning theory and offer practical suggestions for Hullabaloo U. Finally, I explain the limitations of this study and suggest future areas of research in peer mentorship.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine how pre-experiential learning influenced a peer mentor's leadership development and satisfaction within Hullabaloo U. Understanding the importance of peer mentors, I collected data from a survey of peer mentors at Texas A&M University and analyzed their responses. My intentions in doing this included evaluating some of the broad benefits of engaging in mentoring relationships and recommending strategies for Hullabaloo U to maximize the impact of its peer mentors.

#### **Answering the Research Questions**

I first began researching the peer mentors of Hullabaloo U by asking how their participation in Hullabaloo U influenced their leadership development. I measured leadership development by asking the peer mentors to rate whether they agreed that statements about leadership development applied to their circumstances. Comparing their responses to the midpoint of the scale, I found that peer mentors reported that the experience allowed them to develop their leadership skills.



As many factors and circumstances influence something as broad as leadership development of an individual, it was pertinent to examine further how prior experiences and training may have contributed to the peer mentor's leadership development. I asked the peer mentors to report what forms of training they had received before becoming a peer mentor. Results showed that no single training topic contributed to the leadership development of the peer mentor in a statistically significant fashion. However, I note that the scores of leadership development increased as the number of training topics the peer mentor experienced increased. As such, peer mentors with more extensive pre-experiential training and professional development may develop more as leaders within the Hullabaloo U program.

Finally, I analyzed the relationship between a peer mentor's leadership development and their overall satisfaction with Hullabaloo U as an experience. Lifelong learning competencies and satisfaction are positively related (Yenen, 2019). Understanding this relationship, I found a strong correlation between a peer mentor's leadership development and their overall satisfaction with Hullabaloo U. Peer mentors who reported a higher level of leadership development were more satisfied with Hullabaloo U as a program.

In addition to answering my proposed research questions, I performed supplementary analyses and examined how much training each peer mentor reported. More than half of the peer mentors reported that they had received training on all eight topics presented. I also found a small correlation to the number of training topics of a peer mentor and their leadership development and satisfaction scores.

Finally, I ran two ANOVA tests to investigate how leadership development and satisfaction varied with respect demographics. The ANOVA that considered race yielded statistically significant results. However, when I ran the *post hoc* test, the specific, statistically

substantial variables remained indeterminant. In terms of gender, the ANOVA test also revealed statistically significant variables, such that women reported greater gains throughout the peer mentoring than did men.

### **Experiential Learning and Peer Mentoring**

Experiential learning represents a broad net of developmental activity that is highly individualized to the learner. Reasoning that because one experience is exceedingly developmental for a student, it will have the same impact on other students' learning is a faulty assumption (McCall, 2004). As such, educational administrators often wonder: what does a student need to maximize her or his high-impact learning? In regards to peer mentorship practices, this question is central to the peer mentor's success in providing support and assistance to the first-year students. Schmidt and Faber (2016) explained how peer mentoring circles within their female faculty circles led to changes within the culture of the workplace. Hullabaloo U peer mentors may hold similar promise in terms of influencing the adjustment of first-year students and their subsequent retention. Framed in this light, a peer mentor's experiences and leadership development prove critical to the success of Hullabaloo U.

Understanding that most of the peer mentors benefitting from their experiences as a peer mentor, the dialogue must shift to accommodate the discussion of how to maximize these benefits. Coker and Porter (2015) explained how a student's perception of an experiential learning opportunity could significantly impact what he or she learns from the experience. From this knowledge, the researchers concluded that universities must frame the experiential learning opportunity correctly for the student to maximize his or her learning. With my results, I posit that a similar approach to preparation and development for the peer mentors could be beneficial to

improving the overall experience of the mentees, mentors, and instructors of the Hullabaloo U program.

With this proposition in mind, I want to return to the four modes of Kolb's (2018) experiential learning cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Concrete experience references the experience the learner participated in. Reflective observation occurs when a student reviews his or her experiences. Abstract conceptualization describes the process of theorizing about and learning from the experience. Finally, active experimentation occurs when the student applies his or her knowledge to their life (Kolb, 2018). Many teachers and institutions implement this theory as a pedagogy of learning to provide quality instruction, retain students, and push them to seek further education (Bradberry, 2019). However, there exists a caveat to this style of learning in that students must be adequately prepared to receive the experience. For instance, within my literature review, I found that some peer mentoring programs offered peer mentors an academic class or weekly training that focused on developing skills associated with successful peer mentoring practices. Notable models of this method include the Veritas Program (2017) and the University Leadership Network (2017).

I asked the director of the Byrne Student Success Center, Mr. Kelley O'Neal, for his opinion on the purpose of a peer mentor (personal communication, February 11, 2020). Without pause, Mr. O'Neal answered that a peer mentor's role included providing the mentee with the ability to make an "informed decision." He then went on to state a peer mentors' "professional development" contributed to the achievement of this goal. While I did not evaluate the quality of the training the Hullabaloo U peer mentors received, the fact that the amount of training is strongly correlated to the leadership development gives credence to Mr. O'Neal's observation.

## **Limitations**

Within this study, several limitations influenced my results and conclusions. For instance, I administered the survey during the middle of the Hullabaloo U program due to time constraints. The results of the study reflect what the peer mentors perceived as benefits while they were still in the program. If I had surveyed peer mentors after completing the Hullabaloo U program, their responses might have changed.

In addition to this limitation, the study design limited the conclusions of this study. Optimally, I would have had a control group and participants would have been assigned randomly into their condition. Having the ability to compare the leadership development of the peer mentors to the leadership development of a general population may have yielded further insight into the effect of the Hullabaloo U program as an experiential learning program. However, this was not possible; as such, the study is correlational in nature, and generalizations about causation should not be advanced.

Finally, while I framed this study to analyze any relationships between peer mentor training and leadership development, I did not include other factors that may have contributed to the peer mentors' garnered benefits. Other characteristics, such as the mentees or instructor, may have influenced how the peer mentor developed their leadership skills. As such, without further research, I cannot definitively claim peer mentors' benefits maximized by the type and amount of training they receive before their role.

## **Areas of Further Research**

As first-year peer mentoring programs continue to grow, the body of research contributing to the program's success must continue to expand as well. However, while I could

take a broad survey of needed research, I will tailor my suggestions to future research for the Hullabaloo U program specifically.

One specific conclusion that my data did not allow me to draw is what variables led to the peer mentors' leadership development. For instance, perhaps the peer mentor's relationship with their instructor or mentees represented the most significant influencer in his or her growth. However, the present survey does not allow for extrapolating such nuances. As such, future researchers may create a study that explores how the different controllable variables of a peer mentorship program influence the leadership development of the peer mentor.

In addition to this dynamic, I believe it essential to recognize that the Hullabaloo U program is an experiential learning opportunity for the instructors as well. The same question of what benefits a peer mentor receives from peer mentoring can be extended to the instructors. Instructors must introduce college living and learning to first-year students in an intimate class environment. Understanding how instructors prepare to facilitate the course and their learning may help in providing meaningful support for them and contribute to the overall success of first-year students.

On a different note, another area of research revolves around evaluating more specific areas of development for the peer mentor. For instance, in Hullabaloo U, the peer mentor is required to meet one-on-one with a maximum of twenty-five students to gauge their adjustment to college, provide support, and help in connecting the student to resources. This environment opens up the peer mentor to a broad diversity of individuals they otherwise would not come into contact with. As such, I believe a study evaluating how a peer mentor's implicit biases may change throughout the program may yield inciteful findings. Understanding these dynamics of

the peer mentor experience may help Texas A&M, which is considered a primarily white institution (PWI), further evolve into a more inclusive culture.

## CONCLUSION

In conducting this study, I sought to examine the leadership development of peer mentors through the lenses of experiential learning. However, with the application of experiential learning, it is essential to consider the unique context and potential of peer mentors. Other experiential learning opportunities, such as study abroad trips, internships, and service-learning, often require that the student travel from the campus. While this aspect of the opportunity holds benefits, students absent from the campus may not directly contribute to the university culture. Peer mentors, by comparison, engage in experiential learning while helping the university to retain first-year students. They are in a prime position to influence their first-year mentees to persist through the adjustment to university life and succeed. The Hullabaloo U Program recognizes this reality and takes measures to invest in the peer mentors by pairing them with an instructor and providing professional development training.

However, in examining the leadership development of peer mentors, I acknowledge the level of influence they may obtain with first-year students. The Hullabaloo U peer mentoring is relatively new to Texas A&M University, beginning its pilot year in the 2019 fall semester. As such, the peer mentors have a unique role in establishing the precedence and culture for future peer mentors. They will provide an example of what is acceptable peer-mentoring practices and help determine the success of Hullabaloo U. This aspect further incentivizes Hullabaloo U directors to ensure that peer mentors receive preparation to learn experientially.

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# APPENDIX

## Peer Mentoring Survey

### Demographics

What is your gender? Woman \_\_\_\_\_ Man \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

What is your race? Asian \_\_\_\_\_ Black or African American \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic or Latinx \_\_\_\_\_  
Native American \_\_\_\_\_ White \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years

What college are you in? College of Agriculture and Life Sciences \_\_\_\_\_  
College of Architecture \_\_\_\_\_  
Mays Business School \_\_\_\_\_  
College of Education and Human Development \_\_\_\_\_  
College of Engineering \_\_\_\_\_  
College of Geosciences \_\_\_\_\_  
College of Liberal Arts \_\_\_\_\_  
College of Nursing \_\_\_\_\_  
College of Public Health \_\_\_\_\_  
College of Science \_\_\_\_\_  
College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences \_\_\_\_\_

What year are you at Texas A&M? First year \_\_\_\_\_  
Sophomore \_\_\_\_\_  
Junior \_\_\_\_\_  
Senior \_\_\_\_\_

Are you the first member of your family to go to college? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

### Peer Mentor Preparation

Did you receive any training prior to the semester to be a peer mentor? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please indicate the topics covered in the training (mark all that apply):

\_\_\_\_\_ Definition of mentoring                      \_\_\_\_\_ Benefits of mentoring  
\_\_\_\_\_ The need for peer mentoring                      \_\_\_\_\_ Motivating students  
\_\_\_\_\_ Learning outcomes for the program

\_\_\_\_\_ Boundaries and appropriate behaviors with the students

Outside of the peer mentoring activities, have you received other leadership development opportunities? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please describe.

How many hours a week do you spend as a peer mentor? \_\_\_\_\_ hours.

Please reflect back on your semester as a peer mentor and respond to the following items:

	Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Being a peer mentor has helped me develop new leadership skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
I have learned how to motivate others over this semester.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
My skills at influencing others have developed as a result of being a peer mentor.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Being a peer mentor has <i>not</i> impacted my leadership abilities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
As a result of being a peer mentor, I have learned how to help people work toward a common goal.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		

\*\*\*

All in all, I am satisfied with being a peer mentor.

In general, I like working as a peer mentor.

In general, I don't like my peer mentor position.

Satisfaction items from: Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1983)