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Supporting Student Transformation, Wellbeing, and Enriched Trajectories Through Student Alumni Engagement in Mentoring and Coaching Experiences

Dwan V. Robinson, Amy Taylor-Bianco, Ihsan Thaheem, Subekshya Ghimire, and Phillip A. Taylor
Ohio University

This qualitative case study, part of a larger study, examines perspectives of university community members involved in several student and alumni mentoring and coaching pilot programs. This case highlights a university framework that embraces shared and reciprocal mentoring, mentoring circles, and group mentoring and coaching models. Recognizing that multiple mentors or mentoring constellations enrich the academic, life and leadership experiences of students, university faculty and staff piloted student and alumni mentoring and coaching activities alongside the structure of curricular and co-curricular activities. Faculty and staff conveners incorporated student alumni mentoring and coaching learning activities into their courses, and peer mentors were proposed to provide extra support to help increase the comfort level of students. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured groups and individual interviews of mentees, mentors, program conveners, and alumni serving on committees and boards to capture their feedback and ideas about their programs. During this university pilot, mentor and mentee reflections were documented to capture experiences, preferences, snapshots of mentoring and coaching activities from selected groups and courses during a university pilot program. This information was used to develop a university mentoring and coaching framework. Findings highlight how mentoring and coaching enrichment activities can contribute to advancing a mentoring and coaching culture at the studied university. These findings also informed the development of a framework aimed at establishing a sustainable, supportive, and enabling campus-wide student alumni mentoring and coaching ecosystem.

Keywords: Mentoring coaching, student wellbeing, student transformation, culture of mentoring and coaching

Introduction

Mentoring and coaching programs can significantly enhance student development and wellbeing, while also advancing the academic, professional and personal trajectories of students in higher education (Kutsyuruba & Gooden, 2019; Lunsford, Crisp, Dolan & Wuetherick, 2017). Research suggests that flourishing mentoring experiences can greatly enrich the journeys of student mentees by offering broadened academic and social experiences coupled with key psychosocial supports (Jacobi, 1991; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021), that can bolster student growth in academic pursuits, life and leadership development, and professional self-confidence (Lunsford et al. (2017). Scholars also suggest that mentoring can also benefit students by expanding their collaborative and developmental networks (Ghosh et al. 2022; Le et al., 2024). Further, enriching mentoring experiences can strengthen a student's sense of direction in their career exploration and help them with career development (Priest & Donley, 2014).

As a companion to mentoring, coaching experiences have the potential to increase self-awareness and to support the personal and professional development of students (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). While coaching is often not considered due to cost constraints, recent developments in group coaching offer opportunities to integrate coaching into mentoring activities and communities. Scholars suggest coaching facilitates learning, and growth through modeling, to improve communication and leadership skills, and suggest incorporating a sustained and impactful coaching culture into university programs (Seemann et al., 2024).

Research has shown that programs that combine both mentoring and coaching programs can increase a students' sense of belonging, and satisfaction (Ahmed et al. 2021; Kutsyuruba, & Godden, 2019) and can be transformative. These programs have also been known to bolster student retention, persistence, and institutional connectedness (Lunsford et al., 2017). In addition, for programs that offer engagement opportunities for students coupled with alumni, these experiences have been shown to enrich and benefit not only students but alumni as well because they foster alumni affinity and toward their alma matter (Skrzypek et al., 2020). As colleges and universities seek to enhance student development and offer support for the life-long trajectories of students and alumni, mentoring and coaching experiences can be "life-altering" and offer great

promise for mutual learning (Ragins & Kram, 2007) and student growth (Allen & Eby, 2021).

Although there is a growing number of mentoring and coaching programs in colleges and universities (Long et al., 2021); to maximize student achievement and enrichment and to scale mentoring and coaching opportunities, the development of creative, integrative, and intentional approaches is key in transforming student mentoring experiences for greater impact. Consequently, as institutions of higher education seek to build university-wide cultures of mentoring and coaching, programs that integrate innovative models involving groups composed of multiple partners (i.e.: alumni and peers) with students in mutual mentoring and coaching relationships can help to foster these cultures.

This case highlights a university's framework that embraced shared and reciprocal mentoring experiences (Dominguez, 2023), mentoring circles (Darwin & Palmer, 2009) and group mentoring (Huizing, 2012; Zachary, 2012), and coaching models (Broberg et al., 2022) offering rich experiences for student and alumni engagement. Recognizing that multiple mentors or "constellations of mentors" (Kram, 1985) enable individuals to maximize mentoring and coaching experiences, student alumni engagement opportunities were built into the structure of group mentoring and coaching activities on a university's campus. Therefore, highlighted herein are insights from multiple university partners involved in university visioning and pilot initiatives.

Visioning about a Student Alumni Mentoring and Coaching Culture

As a part of a dynamic vision for developing unique and distinctive experiences for students that would inspire them to imagine future possibilities for their academic, life, and leadership journeys, a university community embarked on a system wide process of strategic planning. Coupled with this effort, university leaders sought to involve partners in enriching student experiences and helping to advance student success by engaging them with experiences beyond the boundaries of the campus. University leaders and members of the extended campus community participated in visioning regarding how to offer an expanded community of mentors for students by engaging alumni who were eager to support student advancement and future pathways.

Recognizing the value of mentoring and coaching to student success and wellbeing, leadership at this mid-size university sought to leverage the prospect of enhanced student mentoring and coaching through a deeper understanding of these kinds of activities that were already occurring. Consequently, a qualitative exploration utilizing group interviews and preliminary themes from varied campus partners has contributed to an emergent framework for a university-wide mentoring and coaching ecosystem. This iterative approach to the development of a vision for student alumni mentoring and coaching allowed for the implementation of best practices and group learning approaches from the literature.

As part of this larger study, this work was conceived to support student wellbeing, transformation, and belonging while aligning with the university's mission and values. The approach was envisioned to foster dynamic connections for students through multiple mentoring and coaching engagement points while maintaining and enhancing the institutions' mission. We envisioned that it would be a strategic approach to mentoring that would provide multiple entry points and opportunities for student and alumni interaction. This study explores the perspectives of students, faculty, staff, and alumni mentors regarding the creation of effective practices of a mentoring culture. These insights will contribute to the development of a mentoring and coaching strategy which is paramount to creating a sustainable system supporting student advancement.

Literature Review

There are numerous definitions of mentoring when considering arrangements for students in higher education. Varied scholars suggest that mentoring relationships support students' growth and development through multiple forms of guidance in academic, psychosocial, and professional areas. These mentoring arrangements expose students to role modeling and psychosocial support that fosters identity development and contributes to student thriving, persistence, and retention.

It is also difficult to find a common definition of coaching. Coaching is considered a goal-oriented process focused on skill development. Additionally, it is typically short-term and is facilitated by certified coaches trained in specific methodologies. Its approaches rely on the foundation of the student/coachee being resourceful and can result in improved communication skills, increased confidence, and self-reliance. Coaching often impacts goal clarity and productivity (International Coaching Federation, 2025; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Rogers, 2024).

Overall, mentoring and coaching approaches complement each other by creating a synergistic developmental support system that can fortify students in academic, professional, and personal trajectories. When mentoring is combined with coaching, student motivation to pursue their goals is enhanced. Certified coaches engage individuals in a structured process to define their personal goals and develop pathways to realize them (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). The integration of life coaching experiences into the mentoring experiences has the potential to help individuals become more self-aware, cultivate their strengths, vision about personal goals, and strive to sustain wellbeing across all areas of life (Foroozesh et al., 2024; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018).

Literature suggests that mentoring is evolving from solely the traditional hierarchical approaches (Higgins & Kram, 2001) and shifted toward more collaborative and reciprocal arrangements (Dominguez, 2023). Emerging approaches such as reciprocal mentoring temper the notion of power dynamics in mentoring and establish mentorship as a mutually shared partnership-based experience (Dominguez). Similarly, mentoring cir-

cles or communities replace the standard dyadic paradigm with innovative group mentoring concepts. These circle models have varied arrangements but often include a few mentors, a group of mentees (and occasionally near peer mentors) who share ideas, exchange insights, and guidance within a collaborative setting (Broberg et al. 2022; Bung 2015; Darwin & Palmer, 2009).

Group mentoring and coaching models have a symbiotic focus and embrace the idea of co-sharing and co-construction of knowledge within the communities of mentors and mentees (Lefdahl-Davis et al.; 2018, Limbert, 1995). It has been proven that group mentoring and coaching activities can be catalysts for transformational shared and enriching experiences for group members because they can leverage a full complement of attributes of multiple partners and peers. These shared, reciprocal, group mentoring and coaching arrangements–potentially enable institutions to engage in and offer enriching experiences to a larger cross section of students in colleges and offer promising opportunities to bring mentoring and coaching experiences to scale.

Dominguez (2023) illustrates how reciprocal and group mentoring models promote mutual learning, personal improvement, and professional development. Through planned, reciprocal interactions, these models improve participants' communication, leadership, and critical thinking abilities. There is a noticeable gap however, as many mentoring projects are isolated interventions rather than components of a larger, integrated campus culture. Institutional support, well-defined objectives, expert facilitation, and adaptable frameworks that build and strengthen participants over their educational journeys are essential for the success of these kinds of initiatives. An example of a shared mentoring model piloted in our program included mentoring circles to support the student's alumni engagement activities.

Mentoring circles, which are group-focused alternatives to the traditional one-on-one mentoring relationships, are small groups that convene regularly to share experiences, offer support, and discuss professional challenges. Mentoring circles offer spaces to minimize isolation, enhance a sense of belonging, build confidence, expand networking opportunities, and develop robust interdisciplinary partnerships (Giacumo, 2023: Huizing, 2012). The key factors for success include voluntary involvement, effective facilitation, established goals, and compatibility among group members. When adequately supported, mentoring circles can serve as an effective resource for professional growth and foster institutional engagement (Darwin & Palmer, 2009).

Building upon the concept of mentoring circles (Darwin & Palmer, 2009), group and peer mentoring arrangements connect individuals who navigate similar academic or professional trajectories while supporting one another through shared experiences, emphasizing empathy, and co-learning (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2023). Group and peer mentoring as well as professional learning community style arrangements support the development of shared experiences and broader understandings of mentoring relationships that extend beyond the traditional one-on-one model (Lunsford et al., 2017).

Many mentoring programs in higher education, have often been, grounded in concepts related to student development, leadership, counseling or social work and would thus encourage individuals to be collaborative and socially responsible (Jacobi et al. 1991; Mullen, 2008). Research by Roncaglia et al. (2025) illustrates mentoring arrangements in the form of shared learning experiences and offer peer professional groups in various programs to support collaborative learning by encouraging reflection on practice, confronting assumptions, and sharing collective professional experiences. These types of approaches can inform practices in higher education institutions, especially those that prioritize student-centered mentorship.

Multiple Mentoring Opportunities

Multiple mentoring models champion the importance of having a variety of mentors who can meet a wide range of mentee needs and serve as role models (Blake-Beard et al., 2021; De Janasz & Sullivan 2004; Mezias & Scandura, 2005;). These scholars suggest that multiple mentors can best meet the wide expanse of individuals' needs. Students can be supported through a network of mentors who offer their expertise, motivation, and emotional support. Students can better negotiate uncertainty, solve personal issues, and enhance their academic skills along with collaboration, communication and leadership competences when collaboration, communication and leadership competences when working with multiple mentors who provide guidance in varied areas and on various topics (Foroozesh et al. 2024).

Once the idea that a single mentor can provide all mentoring support is abandoned, students start to exercise more agency by purposefully constructing partnerships and developmental networks that meet their changing academic, professional, and personal demands. (Thurman & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2023; Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2023). These constellations help mentees navigate academic and personal challenges supporting their overall wellbeing. These practices demonstrate that mentorship should not be an isolated or incidental experience, but rather a dynamic, institutionally supported framework that aligns with students' developmental and academic journeys.Vandermaas-Peeler et al.(2023) also suggest embedding constellation-type relationships in both curricular and co-curricular spaces.

As suggested by a cross-section of scholars, appointing a facilitator or "lead mentor" to foster interaction between members, and to help group members maintain ties when face-to-face contact is limited is beneficial (p.17). This suggests that mentorship practices require dynamic structured support rather than isolated efforts. Based on the concept, our case highlights a university framework that embraced shared and reciprocal mentoring experiences (Dominguez, 2023), and group and multiple mentoring (Huizing, 2012) and coaching models (Broberg et al., 2022). This

framework shifted the hierarchical mentoring models to participatory forms of mentoring that supported engagement and mutual growth. Recognizing that multiple mentors or networks of mentors enable individuals to maximize mentoring and coaching experiences, alumni student engagement opportunities were built into the structure of the group mentoring and coaching activities.

As seen in the study by Vandermaas-Peeler et al. (2023), mentoring constellations fostered a long-lasting culture of cooperation and reciprocity in addition to improving access to mentorship opportunities. Through group problem-solving and collaborative reflection, students learned how to negotiate the challenges of both academic and professional life, while mentors gained from participating in continuing professional learning groups (Morales et al., 2021). In this sense, mentorship constellations served as supportive networks that promoted engagement, sense of belonging, and encouraged academic advancement. Our framework reinforced the broader institutional value of our institution, committed to supporting student growth and wellbeing.

Program

Our exploration for a mentoring and coaching ecosystem began by advertising several listening sessions campus-wide to solicit perspectives from students. Participants were encouraged to join the sessions using the marketing slogan "*we want to hear your voice*". The listening sessions were organized to learn about student ideas and desires for mentoring and coaching experiences involving alumni. Listening sessions occurred with students in-person and virtually from the first year through the doctoral level. An array of university partners including students, faculty, administrators, staff and alumni from different groups informed the development of our mentoring and coaching framework. For example, we were invited to conversations with a cross section of alumni with a wide range of life experiences, backgrounds, and eras. Campus-wide listening sessions were also held with faculty and staff who we considered our campus "dreamers" and "doers" and who were passionate about building meaningful connections across the student alumni lifespan. Many of these individuals were already engaged in student alumni collaborative activities as well as mentoring and coaching. These partners were enthusiastic about facilitating shared experiences with students and alumni. These listening sessions with multiple parties created opportunities for us to hear ideas from various campus partners and informed the development of a framework for student alumni mentoring and coaching activities and contributed to a synergistic ongoing visioning process.

The Pilot Program-Structure & Activities

Coupled with the university-wide listening sessions, to explore the feasibility of the student alumni mentoring and coaching initiative, the university administration launched pilot initiatives to inform best practices. The structure of the pilot programs involved a phased rollout of courses and activities with cycles of implementation and refinement around interventions. Various faculty and staff campus partners were encouraged to implement pilot initiatives to engage students with alumni spanning instructional modalities that included a wide range of programs across disciplines. A selection of programs is discussed below.

A program conducted by the authors themselves was structured using group mentoring and mentoring circle approaches advanced by scholars (Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Huizing, 2012; Lunsford et al., 2017). This was conducted to engage students and alumni in mentoring and coaching enrichment activities. A Cross-disciplinary Graduate Student Pilot was offered weekly for graduate students from various disciplines across the campus and included students, alumni, peer leaders, and faculty conveners. Sessions were conducted synchronously online and featured a blend of reflective practices, topical workshops, and alumni engagement.

The program structure allowed for fluidity and connectivity and began based on a group mentoring "many to many" model (Huizing, 2012) with opportunities for students to engage in group, peer and hierarchical experiences as well (Lunsford et al. 2017; Lutz et al. 2017). The sessions included community building activities coupled with anecdotes and testimonials from alumni regarding their academic and life, and career trajectories. Sessions on strategies for productivity, self-awareness, and self-assessment offered opportunities for students and alumni to engage in personal growth and development, coupled with group reflection. Learning activities such as goal setting, time-management, action planning, concept mapping, and similar activities were offered during the sessions.

Alumni panels and speed mentoring activities exposed students to diverse mentoring perspectives as well as provided an opportunity for students to learn about real-world experiences from alumni. As a companion to the mentoring and self-development activities, students were introduced to life coaching and group-based coaching by alumni and special guests in a simulated coaching experience and to learn about resilience. Through the coaching engagement activities, students learned how to normalize challenges, and how to develop adaptive strategies for self-management and coping in day-to-day activities.

Following each session, we collected participant reflections, program feedback, and ideas to consider for the university's mentoring and coaching framework through exit conversations and open dialogue. Alumni feedback and insights were gleaned from listening sessions, pilots, and written correspondence with alumni in a variety of locations. These interactions included alumni from different affinity groups such as recent alumni leaders and advisory board members, who were open and engaged in partnering to reflect on their mentoring and coaching experiences.

A small intimate pilot program of first-generation students in one college was conducted,

to learn what first-year, first-generation students wanted related to career-focused alumni mentoring and engagement. This mentoring program was offered to students in their second semester and enabled them to connect with alumni online. The program was facilitated by a career coach and an advanced first-generation student who served as a peer mentor for the students. The program tested the use of a university-supported, online alumni matching platform and created opportunities for students to engage in career-related exploration. A cohort program was created where students attended four monthly mandatory meetings, engaged in three milestones to support career readiness and community building and included the Dean of the college and four alumni. The staff and students leading the program created an innovative program where great learning occurred.

A cross pedagogical pilot involving students from several programs travelled overseas to Paris, France. This transformational experience was initiated by two faculty including an experienced hospitality and foodways educator with a background in leading culinary mentorship programs that integrate food, cultural understanding, and experiential and active learning. The program was a structured, place-based immersion emphasizing sustainable food systems, professional practice, and cross-cultural engagement. The trip involved undergraduates and a Ph.D. student who participated in supervised shadowing placements with alumni in operational food establishments, including one who is creating a chain of restaurants. Through the alumni contacts these future hospitality professionals interacted with Parisian hospitality environments, engaged with female business leaders, and connected with a high school vocational-tech program that teaches hospitality and culinary.

One of the students had the opportunity to interact with a woman who owned a restaurant franchise. Instructional methods combined experiential learning in professional kitchens coupled with reflective and collaborative activities centered around shared meals and creative exchange. This approach supported the development of technical competencies, global awareness, and professional identity formation within international culinary and hospitality contexts. The experience offered opportunities for students to engage in research and inquiry.

An executive coaching and mentoring pilot program conducted within an online graduate professional program to test and refine the integration of leadership focused coaching and mentoring into the academic experience rather than offering these supports as supplemental services. The coaching and mentoring components were offered across the duration of the program and enabled students to engage virtually with executive coaches and industry mentors. The coaches met with the students and faculty in an online group setting where ground rules were established and continued at each of the two coaching meetings per semester. The initiative was facilitated by experienced executive coaches and supported by volunteer alumni mentors who had engaged with the program previously. Through a group-based structure, students engaged in recurring coaching interactions and developmentally focused mentoring conversations to support leadership growth and professional identity development within the online graduate context.

An initial implementation of a structured one on one mentoring model was conducted within a law-related educational context, building upon an established network of engaged alumni and a previously existing in-person mentoring event. The initiative leveraged existing networks and programmatic assets while introducing new mentoring structures designed to extend engagement beyond a single event and across multiple modalities. The implementation incorporated newly developed virtual mentoring components, including the use of an institutionally supported digital platform to facilitate mentor–mentee meetings and communication in conjunction with in-person interactions. This pilot also sought to inform the ongoing refinement of mentoring processes, including participant preparation, mentoring milestones, and incorporating a new and improved system through which observations and feedback can be used to continually strengthen future iterations.

An initial implementation of a mentorship-through-writing experience was conducted with select students enrolled in a writing seminar course. Mentoring interactions occurred asynchronously through email exchanges between mentors and students, with a total of six structured communications completed over the course of the semester. Each exchange required review and approval prior to dissemination, resulting in a highly curated mentoring process. While the initiative demonstrated the feasibility of mentoring through written communication, it was also labor intensive due to the individualized nature of feedback and the approval requirements for each interaction. Insights from this initial implementation are being used to refine the model, including considerations related to scalability, facilitator workload, and the balance between structure and flexibility in written mentoring formats.

A structured mentoring initiative was conducted in a university leadership development program and built on an existing foundation of alumni who engaged with students in person to facilitate student leadership skills. This program shifted the mentoring structure from traditional one-to-one matching to a mentor family model involving multiple students and mentors engaged collectively. The program also focused on strengthening mentor preparedness and examining the feasibility of group-based mentoring. Insights from this phase of the program have been used to continually refine and sustain the mentoring model.

Insights from convenors of a freshman pilot program revealed that perhaps it would be more beneficial for first year students to connect with near peers or upper class men as freshman and then to connect with alumni in subsequent years. This feedback was also consistent with the Sophomore Experiences Survey (Schreiner & Louis, 2025) which suggests that Sophomore students are an ideal group to engage with new experienc-

es to help support them during a time when many are known to lose interest and engagement academically and socially in college. Another convenor suggested that students preferred community meetings more than one on one meetings at this stage in their trajectory. The engagement of alumni affairs offices can be crucial in finding mentors, while the college faculty and staff were confident in providing program and student content. All saw it as critical that upper class students were involved in the planning.

Results

Emerging themes have offered significant insights that informed the development of our mentoring and coaching framework. Insights from various parties revealed that the evolving model offered the promise of robust, scalable, and transformational experiences for students. Consistent themes provided rich feedback based on the listening sessions, pilots, and reflections from numerous university partners to inform program development. Perspectives from these sources and key insights follow.

Group Listening Session Themes

Themes that emerged from group listening sessions with undergraduate and graduate students revealed a desire for opportunities that offered dynamic and multifaceted student alumni engagement._Preliminary perspectives from students suggest that they initially desire to engage in shared or mutual mentoring experiences as opposed to isolated one-on-one relationships where mentoring is hierarchical and where mentees receive guidance in isolation with a mentor. Students expressed the need for alumni mentoring and coaching that would foster opportunities for them to build sustained, relational, long-term life and leadership guidance. Based on this, students wanted to have accessible pathways or multiple entry points to engage with alumni mentoring and coaching activities. Students desired interactions with alumni that supported their scholarly journeys, career and professional development pursuits. Additionally, students desired to have safe non-judgmental spaces where they could develop mentoring and coaching relationships that would develop into trusting, open, and affirming relationships. Finally, students hoped that the mentoring and coaching experiences would facilitate relationship formation and wellbeing with engagement that would contribute to academic progress, personal, and professional growth.

Alumni and mentors reported that mentoring helped them in self-discovery as they realized the depth of their own knowledge and experience. Mentoring relationships created safe spaces for vulnerability, mutual validation, and genuine connection highlighted as key drivers of program impact. Their shared experiences on academic, career and personal issues fostered empathy and reduced feelings of isolation for both mentors and mentees. In this process, both mentors and mentees found value in normalizing challenges and uncertainties, especially near graduation or during major transitions. Reciprocal mentoring benefited both mentors and mentees, and their relationships evolved from top-down guidance to two-way partnerships reflecting authentic exchange over the isolated approach of traditional mentoring. Moreover, recommendations for program improvement included the need to provide students with more agency in mentoring experiences and matching processes with algorithmic matching based on shared interests and goals.

Pilot Themes

Insights from students in the group mentoring and coaching pilot revealed how reciprocal mentoring experiences facilitated discussion and made them feel seen and supported through the connections they formed with other students. This is consistent with Dominguez (2023) who suggests that reciprocal mentoring can help to bolster a mentee's sense of belonging, self-awareness, and self-confidence through conversations, reflection, and shared feedback (p.109).

The group-based approach enriched the coaching experience for students by incorporating varied viewpoints when setting goals, developing strategies for meeting those goals while fostering valuable relationships between and among mentees, multiple mentors, and peer leaders.

Students described how early participation in mentoring circles began to provide support and guidance during their studies. Some noted that these group relationships were starting to help them manage challenges and recognize their achievements both individually and collectively. As connections within the mentoring circles developed, students discussed some initial differences in wellbeing and a growing sense that this support could contribute to both their academic progress and personal or professional growth.

Alumni & Mentor Feedback

Alumni and mentor feedback were collected to assess reciprocal and group benefits and program processes. A few of the emerging themes were desire for training mentors set parameters, promotes consistency and helps to alleviate some of the uncertainty around mentoring. Alumni expressed having previous conceptions of 1:1 mentoring and a desire to understand how mentoring circles work and how beneficial they are for alumni-alumni connection in addition to connection to students. Experiences with professional coaching were discussed, and some alumni spoke about the need for certified experienced coaches due to the impact they have had on their careers. There was a strong desire to have clearly outlined expectations and time commitments whether it is for engaging in the 30,000-foot level through large group experiences or relating to someone who desires more specific guidance or mentoring.

Long-Term Aspirations for Mentoring Relation ships

Participants expressed the need for long-term mentoring with reciprocal, developmental,

and professional relationships that stretched beyond the confines of formal programming. They realized that mutual, relational, and shared mentoring and coaching can be enriching, is needed and impactful throughout a person's career. These connections made them feel that they will always have access to mentors as reliable sources for guidance, feedback, and professional insight. Over time it is anticipated that as student mentees advance or as they graduate, they will be encouraged to take on the role of mentors and give back to the university, thus creating a cycle of mutual growth and contribution to the institutional community.

A fundamental goal of this mentoring and coaching framework is to create circles of support, professional communities, and developmental networks that encourage shared learning, cooperation, and collective progress. These mentoring connections are also intended to help individuals achieve healthy perspectives on life balance and wellbeing and professional orientations toward career advancement, and leadership development. Maintaining frequent interaction was deemed crucial to sustaining long-term professional growth and reinforcing the ongoing value of mentorship as a dynamic and developing relationship, even after the official mentoring program ends.

Discussion

The proposed multi-level framework aligns with the literature advocating for whole institution approaches over isolated programs (Dominguez, 2023; Goh & Richardson, 2024). Our emerging findings on student preferences support recent research that suggests how enriching group, reciprocal, and mutual mentoring experiences coupled with one-on-one mentoring can be (Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Dominguez, 2023; Huizing, 2012). An early exploration of group coaching approaches has also begun to yield insightful opportunities that support student learning and self-awareness.

As this project evolved, the proposed multi-level framework began to align with the literature advocating for whole institution approaches over isolated programs (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2023). While envisioning the overall campus framework, we recognized the importance of curricular integration and faculty involvement as this was suggested by both students and staff during the listening sessions. Limitations of the study include small pilot samples and results that may not generalize to all institutional groups and contexts. We found that there were nuances in the varied structure of the programs and the extent to which alumni were engaged in student activities. We found that flexibility, however, provided opportunities for innovation and diversity in program offerings, thus appealing to a wider range of students.

Conclusion

This paper highlights an institution-wide mentoring and coaching initiative that helped to promote a culture supporting student well-being and transformation. Pilot program participants confirmed listening session feedback that multiple mentoring arrangements and relationships could yield robust outcomes for students within the different roles offered in the higher education setting. Overwhelmingly, the feedback from students, alumni, and faculty expressed a need for shared and group mentoring and coaching experiences, and constellations of mentors as opposed to solely one-on-one matches. The results from this exploration underscore the significance of developing a holistic mentoring and coaching ecosystem that emphasizes both the personal and professional development of students. We recognize that a truly transformational mentoring and coaching framework also requires critical assessment of power structures within mentoring groups. It is essential to regard mentoring and coaching not only as interventions but also as ways to invest in students in higher education. By adopting adaptable and multi-faceted mentoring approaches, institutions can establish enduring and impactful mentoring environments that cater to the changing requirements of a diverse student population.

The findings of our preliminary work indicate that students in higher education are eager to engage in shared multi-directional mentoring and coaching experiences, and that these developmental networks and relationships contribute to student's sense of belonging, advancement, and persistence to graduation. We have also discovered that for this work to be embraced, mentoring experiences and practices must be reflective of the needs and preferences of students and embedded in multiple facets of student life. Consistent with emerging literature, we suggest that for this work to be institutionally anchored and sustained over time, an enabling organizational culture coupled with institutional buy-in must exist showing a commitment to building a culture of mentoring and sustainable mentoring practices within the institution. These practices should be regularly evaluated to effectively address the multidimensionality of students and their changing needs. By prioritizing mentoring and coaching as collective institutional practice, universities can create a culture of support for students that go beyond conventional academic limits. These practices not only prepare students for life, leadership, and career achievements but also support the overall wellbeing of the students by offering them the additional support that can enable them to flourish and thrive in a competitive world.

Future opportunities exist for further study to explore the scalability of such university-wide mentoring programs. Studies might also consider examining the training needs of faculty and staff, and alumni mentors to sustain the implementation of mentoring and coaching activities. Additionally, an investigation of program expansion opportunities that leverage the depth of alumni experiences offers promising possibilities for future student enrichment. As universities integrate more innovative, varied mentoring models, further research is needed to discover how multiple digital technologies and mentoring arrangements can contribute to the maximization of student and alumni mentoring experiences.

In conclusion, the rich opportunity and the value of the student alumni mentoring and coaching activities to transform the lives of students is apparent. As institutions continue to develop mentoring and coaching programming that engages students and alumni through curricular and co-curricular activities it will be important to build on the existing work of faculty and staff and commit to resourcing, evaluating, and expanding mentoring and coaching initiatives. This represents ay for strengthening and advancing mentoring and coaching campus-wide cultures. Addressing them can enhance student development and wellbeing, and support stronger, more sustainable educational, life, leadership and career pathways.

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About the Authors

Dr. Dwan Vanderpool Robinson is a Professor in Educational Leadership in the Department of Educational Studies at Ohio University (OHIO). She holds a Ph.D. in Education Policy and Leadership from The Ohio State University. Dr. Robinson teaches doctoral courses in leadership, educational leadership, educational policy, and school and community relations. Her scholarship focuses on educational leadership for learning organizations, mentoring and coaching in education, education policy and advocacy, the educational experiences of underrepresented groups, and school and community engagement. Dr. Robinson co-created Bobcats Help Bobcats, a university-wide mentoring and coaching framework to engage students and alumni in life and leadership mentoring and coaching through multiple pathways. She also co-created and leads several mentoring programs at OHIO including The Faculty Mentoring Program, a mentoring program for new faculty, and The Mentor Leaders Faculty Learning Community, a professional development series to train and support for faculty mentors. Dr. Robinson also mentors and advises doctoral students and leads doctoral cohorts in educational leadership.

Dr. Amy Taylor-Bianco is a Professor of Management at Ohio University. She is also a business psychologist and podcast host with a 25-year record of leading, coaching and engaging people and organizations through appreciative, positive leadership and systems change from the organizational to individual levels. Dr. Taylor-Bianco co-created Bobcats Help Bobcats, a university-wide mentoring and coaching framework to engage students and alumni in life and leadership mentoring and coaching through multiple pathways. She is the Director of the Master of Science in Management at the Ohio University College of Business, having previously earned her doctoral degree from Columbia University. Dr. Taylor-Bianco published in such journals as Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology as well as writing for Forbes and writing "Appalachian Farmers: Building Value from Values," published in the Journal of Values-Based Leadership.

Ihsan Thaheem is a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Leadership with a policy emphasis at Ohio University (OHIO). He is a Graduate Assistant with the OHIO's Faculty Mentoring Program. He is an AACTE Holmes Scholar and holds an MBA in Finance and an LL.B. in Law. His research interests include crisis leadership, educational policy implementation, social cohesion, mentoring, and program evaluation, with a focus on equity and leadership in complex educational contexts. His scholarly work engages interdisciplinary perspectives to inform policy, leadership practice, and institutional responses to contemporary challenges in education.

Subekshya Ghimire is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Teacher Education at Ohio University. Her research focuses on exploring place-based approaches to Social and Emotional Learning in rural schools with an emphasis on how curriculum and pedagogical practices can support wellbeing, equity, and community-engaged learning. Her broader interest includes spatial inequities, student mentorship, and storytelling practices. Her professional experience includes work on international education and research projects in collaboration with Finnish and Norwegian institutions, where she contributed to curriculum development.

Phillip A. Taylor, IV is an interdisciplinary Ph.D. student at Ohio University (OHIO), with academic interests spanning management, psychology, engineering, and education. With an MBA and a BBA in Management Information Systems and Business Analytics, his research explores mentorship and higher education. Professionally, he has worked as an Adjunct Faculty member at Husson University, teaching international business and international managerial decision-making. Phillip has also worked in cybersecurity at Cisco (SOC Intern) and as a Cyber Security Intern at Fiserv. In addition, he serves as an IT Service Desk Specialist and Student Coordinator at OHIO, leading a 16-person student team.