

Expanding Opportunities for Latina College Students: Faculty-mentored Research at a Hispanic-serving Institution

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Mentoring is a highly effective practice that can provide Latina students with a caring role model that demonstrates the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to be successful in college and beyond. Career readiness is an important area to include in college student mentoring practices. This paper describes the development and implementation of a grant funded research project designed to provide a faculty mentored research experience to students enrolled in the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge, the SEEK Department at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Some of the questions that gave shape to this work included: Why is it important to engage underrepresented, economically challenged students in faculty-mentored research? How do you effectively engage students who are often overlooked for such opportunities? What outcomes can be accomplished by engaging students in faculty-mentored research? This body of work serves to improve the teaching and learning experience for Latinas at HSIs and seeks to add to the literature about the importance of mentoring in higher education.

Keywords: college success, career readiness, faculty-mentored research, Hispanic-serving institution

Acknowledgement: This project received funding from the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) union at the City University of New York. This paper presents findings about a PSC-CUNY grant funded initiative where students in the SEEK Department were employed as research assistants working with a faculty mentor on a research project about peer mentoring.

Introduction

Mentoring is a highly effective practice that can provide Latina students with a caring role model that demonstrates the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to be successful in college and beyond. Consequently, mentoring has been found to positively influence the educational experiences of undergraduate students attending Hispanic Serving Institutions, particularly racially and ethnically diverse students (Moschetti et al., 2018) and first year students (Musoba et al., 2013). Musoba et al. (2013) examined the needs of first year Black and Hispanic students attending a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and found that providing quality mentoring to these students helped them feel more confident about their ability to be successful in college and increased their sense of belonging. Furthermore, Pittman and Richmond (2008) argue that enhancing sense of belonging and facilitating positive social bonds among students can result in better adjustment to college. The authors suggest that increased sense of university belonging is linked to positive self-perceptions and a decrease in internalizing behaviors including anxiety and depression among students (Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

Career readiness is an important area to include in college student mentoring practices. Career readiness is defined as “the foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success

in the workplace and lifelong career management” (National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2021). The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) offers a framework that includes the following competencies: critical thinking, communication, teamwork, equity and inclusion, career and self-development, leadership, professionalism, and technology. This framework is particularly useful when providing mentoring for the purpose of career exploration, career development, and professionalization. Mentoring is a highly impactful and effective professional development activity where students working with faculty mentors can acquire the critical thinking and writing skills required for scientific inquiry (Boysen et al., 2020).

While efforts have been made to advance this area of study, research about mentoring and the effectiveness of such programming efforts is still lacking (Gershenfeld, 2014; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). This paper describes the development and implementation of a grant funded research project designed to provide a faculty mentored research experience to students enrolled in the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge - SEEK Department at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. With the intention of adding to the mentoring services already offered and contributing to the existing body of literature about the impact peer mentoring can have on students attending Hispanic Serving Institutions, this project specifically focused on economically

challenged students, ethnically and racially diverse students, first year students, and students interested in career exploration.

Institutional Context

John Jay College of Criminal Justice is one of 25 colleges at the City University of New York (CUNY), the largest urban public institution in the nation. CUNY serves 243,000 degree-seeking students at every level, including those working towards associates, bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees (CUNY, 2023). Several CUNY campuses including John Jay College have received the Hispanic Serving Institution designation, a relatively new designation assigned by the federal government to institutions where at least 25% of the enrolled student body identify as Hispanic. While many universities and colleges meet the enrollment requirement for this designation, scholars suggest that the faculty, curriculum, and pedagogical practices may not meet the needs of Hispanic students attending (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Greene & Oesterreich, 2019; Nunez et al., 2010). Research suggests that factors such as identity development and cultural orientation, generational status, and the college environment profoundly influence the academic experience and success of Latino college students and recommend that colleges and universities strive toward creating a more culturally relevant and responsive environment for Latinos by attending to these factors (Torres, 2003). Alcocer and Martinez (2018) argue that Hispanic students may be more comfortable and can benefit from working with mentors who share a similar cultural orientation and are familiar with their cultural backgrounds. The authors suggest that a safe environment, a shared vision of success, and mutual support are essential components of a good mentoring relationship and can result in a more effective mentoring program (Alcocer & Martinex, 2018).

Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) is a civil rights era initiative at CUNY designed to provide educational access to undergraduate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As an opportunity program, SEEK receives state funding to provide eligible students from low-income families with support services including financial aid, academic support, and counseling services throughout their entire college career (CUNY, 2024). At John Jay College, SEEK is also an academic department that offers credit bearing courses at the 100, 200, and 300 levels. These Education and Justice courses focus on educational equity, broadly defined. In 2014, SEEK at John Jay obtained external funding to start a peer mentoring program and continues to provide peer mentoring services to enrolled students despite serious challenges around funding. Peer mentors are recruited from the SEEK student body and hired to assist first year SEEK students as they transition from high school to college, encourage SEEK students on academic

probation as they develop the academic and social skills required to overcome academic difficulties, and support recent transfers as they successfully adjust to their new institutional context.

Expanding Undergraduate Opportunities

The Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the union at the City University of New York has expressed an interest in funding career exploration and professional development initiatives for university students. This paper presents findings about a PSC-CUNY grant funded initiative where students in the SEEK Department were employed as research assistants working with a faculty mentor on a research project about peer mentoring. The hope was to offer a student-centered professional development activity which could result in a productive learning experience for both the students and the faculty mentor involved. The research project served multiple purposes. First and foremost, students who are often overlooked or undervalued would have the opportunity to participate in a faculty-mentored research experience and develop the knowledge and skills needed to engage in meaningful research. Second, the project could yield important findings that could add to the existing literature about mentoring economically challenged first year students at HSIs. Third, the research findings could be useful for publication, dissemination of information on best practices in peer mentoring at HSIs and faculty mentored undergraduate research in general. Some of the questions that gave shape to this work included: Why is it important to engage underrepresented, economically challenged students in faculty-mentored research? How do you effectively engage students who are often overlooked for such opportunities? What outcomes can be accomplished by engaging students in faculty-mentored research?

The yearlong project began during the summer of 2022 with identifying and recruiting research assistants from the SEEK student population. During the 2022-2023 academic year, research assistants attended weekly meetings with an assigned faculty mentor to explore research as a potential career option, discuss research planning and development, and engage in basic research related tasks. The goal was to help participating students understand that research is meaningful, research informs best practices, and research can be a viable career option.

Implementation of Caring Student-Centered Mentoring Practices

The project initiated with identifying and recruiting research assistants from the SEEK student population. Research assistants worked five hours per week, reviewed research literature about college student mentoring, and assisted in the development of questions for an interview protocol to be used in an evaluation of the SEEK

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Table 1
Best Practices in Undergraduate Research Mentorship

Learning Goals
Promote the development of research knowledge, skills, and habits of mind
Promote the development of research ethics
Promote team spirit and collegiality
Promote professional identity and development
Encourage students to present research findings in professional settings
Mentorship
Plan the research experience before it starts
Scaffold research experiences so that expectations, ownership, and independence increase over time
Have regularly scheduled meetings
Provide opportunities for one-on-one mentoring
Assess outcomes of research experiences
Provide regular feedback on performance

peer mentoring program. Research assistants met with the faculty mentor on a video conferencing platform to discuss research planning and development. The platform allowed for greater flexibility in scheduling weekly meetings that accommodated both research assistants and the faculty mentor. The meeting format included an embodied opening practice, check in, updates about progress, next steps, and commitments to self-care. This format created a sense of consistency where research assistants knew what to expect and arrived prepared to engage in a deeply relational experience.

At the start of each meeting, the faculty mentor invited research assistants to arrive gently and at their pace then engaged the student in a short breathing practice and quick body scan. These embodied practices allow each person to notice how they were feeling at the start of the meeting. During the check-in, the faculty mentor asked research assistants how they were showing up and how their semester was moving along. This gave the research assistants an opportunity to talk about how they were feeling and build trust with the faculty mentor. Over time, research assistants discussed their classes, relationships, interests, goals, and dreams as well as difficulties, concerns, and fears. During the updates, research assistants would report on their progress on research related activities which led to deeper inquiry and identifying next steps for further exploration. Finally, the meeting would close with a commitment to self-care where research assistants would identify one thing they would do to take care of themselves during the week. Self-care commitments included taking a walk in nature, spending time with friends, resting a little more, or simply eating a favorite dessert.

Using a student-centered approach, the experience was framed as a valuable professional development activity where students could acquire critical thinking skills, research focused skills, and effective communication skills useful in college and beyond, particularly in their future careers.

Research assistants gained valuable professional skills through writing emails, meeting weekly to discuss personal, academic, and career related issues, and engaging in research-related tasks such as conducting research about best practices in mentoring ethnically and racially diverse students, mentoring at HSIs, mentoring as a professional practice, and the impact of mentoring on mental health.

Research assistants were instructed to create a Google Doc where they documented all of their research-related activities including summaries of annotated journal articles, reflection notes, and other relevant sources. The faculty mentor used the shared document to communicate with them, ask questions, give feedback, and provide direction. The faculty mentor used email communications to provide a recap of the meeting, ideas that came up during the meeting, and further instructions for research assistants. The Google Doc and all email communications were used to reflect deeply and inform next steps in the research process. The shared documents and emails were also useful as data collection instruments.

Research is an iterative process that takes time and should not be rushed. The work of Boysen, et al. (2020) outlined in Table 1 was extremely useful for guiding a paced, professional mentoring experience and offer best practices for undergraduate research mentorship. Of great significance was the idea of scaffolding the research experience so participants gained the skills needed, took ownership of the research project, and became more independent over time. Project activities included regularly scheduled meetings for the purpose of relationship building, goal setting, creative collaboration, and project development. Assigned tasks included literature searches, critical reading, critical analysis, meaningful dialogue, critical reflection, and dissemination of findings. Research assistants were given the opportunity to identify an area of personal interest and to engage in meaningful inquiry about their selected topic. They were

encouraged to find and read research and other sources about their topic. Research assistants engaged in conversation at length about their selected topics and the faculty mentor provided critical feedback, asked probing questions, or suggested recommendations for next steps.

Aha Moments: Challenges that Resulted in Accomplishments

Research Topic

While mentoring was the overarching topic, it was important for research assistants to feel connected and personally invested in the research project they were involved in. Oftentimes, research assistants are invited to join a research project with a specifically defined focus and assigned tasks that will contribute to an already established research agenda. In this case, research assistants were given the general topic of college student mentoring. They were then encouraged to find an area of personal interest within that topic thereby extending the research further and aligning the research with their own interests. Research assistants were tasked with finding a niche and finding supporting articles they thought were both informative and interesting. The areas of diverging interests made for thought-provoking discussions which often resulted in more questions and further investigation leading research assistants to engage the research literature once again. Some areas of interests included best practices for mentoring Hispanic students, the professional development needs of mentors working in educational settings, and mentoring students with mental health issues. These specific areas of interest stemmed from the broad research focus, which was mentoring; however, they were more aligned with what the research assistants wanted to know more about. They were now working on their own research interests and creating their own research agenda around their topics of interest without feeling forced to work on a research topic assigned by me.

Imposter Syndrome

Coined by Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Ament Imes in 1978, the imposter phenomena involves feeling like a fraud, not being confident in one's abilities, and attributing one's accomplishments to luck or chance and not to one's actual abilities. Many extremely successful students and faculty who identify as BIPOC, Latinx, economically challenged, neurodivergent or with other historically marginalized identities experience imposter syndrome, which is accompanied by feelings of alienation, not belonging, or not fitting in (Gay, 2004; Gonzalez, 2007; Garcia & Henderson, 2014; Holloway-Friensen, 2021). Research assistants working on the project expressed ambivalence about being able to effectively engage in the research project, never imagined research as a career option, and shared that initially they did not view themselves as competent researchers. This was an idea that

the faculty mentor challenged by presenting evidence of their significant contributions to the advancement of the research project. While imposter syndrome is extremely debilitating, confronting it with truth-telling and evidence helped research assistants gain confidence in their own abilities and resulted in them developing their own voice and agency in the research process.

Providing and Receiving Constructive Feedback

Mentoring undergraduate research assistants involves providing a scaffolded experience where students slowly develop the skills and confidence to work both collaboratively and independently. Given that this was a new project, the structure and organization of the project developed over time as we realized what worked and what needed improvement. At first, the faculty member provided an enormous amount of coaching around the practicalities of research which included effective use of the campus library to find research articles, direction on how to critically read and analyze research articles, and guidance about incorporating other sources such as YouTube videos, blogs, and social media outlets as possible research materials to explore and include. Research assistants were assigned weekly tasks and instructed to keep a log of their work on a Google Doc which was shared with the faculty member. The quality of work improved over time because of gentle reminders and constructive feedback provided about the depth and breadth of their contributions on the shared document. Each research assistant worked independently on their own document and was able to elaborate on their chosen area of interest.

Providing constructive feedback is a professional skill that is developed over time by faculty members. However, what was particularly interesting was when the research assistants provided constructive feedback to the faculty member. One instance involved a research assistant commenting on the use of outdated references which led to a rich discussion about meaningful research that stands the test of time and the inclusion of more recent materials including those generally not included in more traditional research such as blogs, YouTube videos, and information found on social media. Another interesting conversation was about the long existing idea that quantitative research methods are more important, relevant, and respected than qualitative research approaches. This led to conversations about narrative inquiry, ethnographic methods, and participatory action research which seemed more interesting to read and critique for some of the research assistants. Providing and receiving constructive feedback during regularly scheduled meetings influenced the direction of our work and led to more diversity, inclusivity, and attention to equity and access.

Voices of Latinas in Higher Education

Identity including race, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, and even geographic location informs beliefs, values, and worldviews. Explicitly discussing researcher positionality with undergraduate research assistants is of critical importance because positionality can influence research methods, process, outcomes, and implications (Yip, 2023). Research suggests that engaging in reflexive practice can result in greater understanding and increased awareness of the influence positionality can have on the research being conducted (Yip, 2023). As the faculty member involved in this project, I disclosed many aspects of my own identity with the research assistants during the course of the project which served to humanize the mentoring experience. As a first-generation Latina college student, I experienced several challenges during my educational experience including the lack of Latina mentors in higher education. Research suggests that Latinas in higher education often experience lack of understanding and feelings of alienation (González, 2007; García & Henderson, 2014; Holloway-Friesen, 2021). Some experience benign neglect and suffer intellectual and scholarly abandonment (Gay, 2004). I certainly did. Moreover, traditional curriculum often lacks diversity, representation, and inclusivity which makes it hard for Latinas to see themselves as intellectuals and scholars. As a student, I was not exposed to many Latina scholars and most of the research about people of color that I read was deficit-based work. These findings and my personal experiences highlight the importance of creating an environment where Latinas can thrive intellectually, particularly at HSIs.

The invitation to engage in research is critical for Latina undergraduates because it communicates confidence in their ability to engage in scholarly work. Latinas can begin to see themselves as capable producers of knowledge and their participation in research activities can contribute to an increased sense of academic confidence and institutional belonging. Furthermore, paid opportunities inform them of their potential to earn money while engaging in intellectual work. These paid opportunities contribute to their professional development and expand their professional networks. They offer students the opportunity to learn, expand, and grow as scholars.

Gabrielle Andrade: Exploring Possibilities Beyond the Undergraduate Experience

During junior and senior year of college, students start thinking about their future beyond the undergraduate experience. These plans may include furthering their education or entering the workforce. Engaging in a mentored research experience prepares students to pursue either of these options by providing them with opportunities to develop transferable skills including investigation, analysis, interpretation,

and application. Reflecting on why she participated in the project Andrade states,

When I was first invited to participate in Dr. Diaz-Mendoza's research project I was in my senior year of undergrad and was just starting my research journey. I accepted this position as a research assistant because of finances. I wanted to build my CV for graduate school, gain more research experience, and highlight the importance and great work SEEK and their peer mentoring program have done throughout the years. Some of the things that I hoped to gain from being a research assistant were to do interviews and surveys, analyze data, conduct literature reviews, and learn the IRB process. Due to this opportunity, I was able to get my certificate to engage in research with human subjects and learn the tedious process it takes to get approval from the IRB. I was able to see the start of the project and the process, whereas in the past I have only worked from secondary analysis.

Andrade wondered why first generation economically challenged BIPOC students do not see themselves as researchers and how mentoring is beneficial. Andrade comments,

In the past, I was afraid to give others my opinion due to shyness and fear of saying the wrong thing, but due to this opportunity and mentor, I felt like my voice mattered, and I was able to present/share important findings I found in the literature. These skills have enhanced my academic experience by being able to share my research experience in my graduate program. I have also been able to get jobs as a research assistant after working on this project, because of all the great skills I've developed.

Providing Latinas with opportunities to explore future possibilities while developing highly transferable skills is crucial for their success beyond the undergraduate experience whether their goal is to engage in graduate studies or enter the job market immediately after graduating. Students may forgo unpaid opportunities that while useful in terms of professional capacity building, do not align with their financial needs. Engaging in paid research activities helps Latinas to build a skillset and increase their confidence.

While mentoring is of critical importance for Latina college students, representation matters as well. Latina undergraduates can benefit greatly from exposure to faculty members that share their gender, cultural background, and language. Andrade comments about the importance of having a mentor with a similar background,

She was the first Latina that I met at John Jay who had her PhD, and it piqued my interest especially because I was interested

in pursuing a PhD straight after undergrad. I was inspired to know there was someone that was a woman and Latinx, that was able to get a PhD but also conduct their own funded project. She allowed me to be creative when it came to the research project, when it came to research questions, journals, and suggestions on which direction we should take the project. Due to this experience, I learned how to work with others when it comes to research, such as brainstorming ideas, sharing resources, and making decisions as a group if a resource is relevant to the project.

Listening to Latina students helps institutional actors understand how they feel and what they need to be successful while in college and beyond. This mentoring experience gave Latina students an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations about what was important to them, what they needed and wanted, and how the institution could serve them best.

Gabriela Molina Zamora: Reflections about Mentoring and Participatory Action Research

When I was invited to participate in this project, I was a senior in college and had been involved in the peer mentoring program for a few years. I was well-acquainted with the program's goals and its methods of supporting students on their college journey. I wanted to investigate how well peer mentoring meets students' needs and identify any gaps. This project was important to me because I wanted to ensure that students, especially those from marginalized communities like myself, received all-around support—academically, financially, and personally—to succeed in college. Another motivating factor for pursuing this faculty-mentored project was the opportunity to work with Dr. Diaz-Mendoza, a Latina researcher who understands the importance of supporting minority students.

As a research assistant, I hoped to gain a deep understanding of what makes a student program effective. I had many questions, such as whether increased staff presence, interactive events, and peer mentors' ability to connect with students from diverse backgrounds impact student retention. Additionally, I aimed to gain more experience in research, including developing insightful questions and determining the best methods for exploring them, whether through qualitative or quantitative data collection. Another factor I hoped to gain from being a research assistant was being able to connect with people who perhaps shared and offered different perspectives. The different perspectives would help tailor the program.

I was curious to gain a deeper understanding of what students gain from these peer mentoring events, how staff contribute to students' enthusiasm for college and engagement with the peer mentoring program, and how being a minority affects student success. This research

helped clarify many of my questions, both as a minority student and a peer mentor. Answering these questions would describe the most effective ways to support students as peer mentors while also strengthening my research skills and enhancing my perspective as both a peer mentor and a student. I chose to be a part of a research project that contributes to learning more about how to support POC like myself.

Through participating in the research project, I gained valuable insights from interviews that explored participants' past and present experiences with the program, as well as their perspectives on its strengths and weaknesses. My learning extended beyond the research conducted with Dr. Diaz-Mendoza; I also studied similar programs and their implementation, which provided a broader context. Debriefing with Dr. Diaz-Mendoza allowed me to compare our findings with those of other programs and understand our similarities and differences.

I developed a deeper understanding of qualitative research, particularly through interviewing staff, faculty, and students about their experiences with the peer mentoring program. This process revealed varying opinions on what aspects of the program were effective. I learned that research is dynamic—what works well one year might not be applicable the next, highlighting the importance of ongoing research. From this experience, I learned that research is crucial for comprehensively understanding how programs operate. It provides detailed explanations for why certain elements succeed or fail.

Additionally, through mentoring, I recognized that every student is unique and requires individualized support. I discovered the significance of interactive events, where mentors, being closer in age to students, help foster motivation and connections. Lastly, I learned that peer mentoring is particularly vital for students from marginalized communities, especially when mentors are BIPOC. It creates a sense of security and cultural understanding, making students feel more supported and safer as it did for me.

As a research assistant, I gained several practical skills. I learned effective communication techniques, which were crucial for interviewing staff and students. This involved customizing my communication style to suit different groups. Additionally, I became proficient in using audio transcription tools. Since most interviews were conducted via Zoom, I needed to record and transcribe the conversations accurately. This role also enhanced my problem-solving skills. Through readings, interviews, and debriefing sessions with Dr. Diaz-Mendoza, I experienced "ah-ha" moments where I could identify common themes, such as the value of interactive events.

These skills significantly enhanced both my academic and professional experiences. They ignited my interest in researching the school-to-prison pipeline and exploring how programs like peer mentoring could positively impact students

and retention in marginalized communities. This experience helped me choose a program for my master's program at Columbia University's School of Social Work, where I aim to be involved in schools and programs like peer mentoring and connect with experts who could help fund and develop similar initiatives. Professionally, I aspire to improve programs that better address students' needs. Working with Dr. Diaz-Mendoza underscored the importance of research not only in academia but also in its practical applications to real-life scenarios.

I am a 21-year-old first-generation Latina from Ecuador, raised in Queens. My journey from Ecuador to the U.S. in pursuit of opportunities has profoundly shaped who I am today. This experience has heightened my awareness of how people of color (POC) often lack resources and opportunities, particularly within the education system. Living in a world that still operates under systemic racism, I noticed a significant decline in Latino/a representation as I pursued higher education. This disparity fueled my determination to "beat the odds" and obtain a degree that historically has not been accessible to people like me. In my family, pursuing a degree has always been emphasized as a key to success. However, I question how attainable a degree is for all students, especially immigrants facing restrictions related to their immigration status, or those lacking access to high-quality education and support services like tutoring and mentoring. The obstacles for Latinos in higher education are significant.

Being mentored by a Latina professor reinforced my commitment to continuing my education to support BIPOC individuals and create safe, nurturing environments for them. As I advanced in my educational journey, I observed an obvious decrease in individuals who shared my background, a reflection of a system that often fails minority students. Working with Dr. Diaz-Mendoza was a dream come true; she embodies a genuine advocate for minority student success and empowers them through research programs. Interacting with her was different from working with faculty who are not from similar backgrounds. While each person's experience is unique, Dr. Diaz-Mendoza's shared cultural understanding provided a profound connection and insight that was deeply meaningful to me.

Being mentored by Dr. Diaz-Mendoza, a Latina faculty member, helped me define my true passion for advocating for people of color, particularly students, and ensuring they receive adequate resources. Being a part of Dr. Diaz-Mendoza's research project sparked my own interest in exploring how Ecuador can provide better and more affordable education and develop programs that better address students' needs. It helped me further understand how my race and ethnicity are affected within educational institutions. This experience has deepened my curiosity about systemic issues and potential solutions, reinforcing my belief that research is a crucial step toward

meaningful change. Being part of this project was an honor, and I believe it can serve as an inspiring example for other POC students. Seeing Latinas conducting research may encourage them to explore their own curiosity and engage in research initiatives.

Outcomes of the Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research Experience

The opportunity to engage in a faculty mentored undergraduate research experience resulted in a powerful relational activity for both participating students and the faculty member involved. As a professional development activity, the following NACE competencies were weaved into the mentoring experience: critical thinking, communication, teamwork, equity and inclusion, career and self-development, leadership, professionalism, and technology (NACE, 2021). These skills prepare students to be desirable candidates for future work opportunities and contribute to their development as highly effective employees.

Using the model developed by Boysen et al.(2020), the faculty mentor, was able to develop a meaningful student-centered professional development experience that relied on best practices for undergraduate research focusing on learning goals that promote the development of research knowledge, skills, and habits of mind, encourage the development of research ethics, encourage collegiality, and promote professional identity and self-development. Boysen et al. (2020) also recommend that the experience be scaffolded so that expectations, ownership, and independence increase over time, that there be opportunities for one-on-one mentoring and regular feedback, and that performance be assessed to evaluate outcomes of research experiences. These were extremely useful recommendations and were implemented in this project to create a generative educational experience for students that are often overlooked and underserved.

The goals of the faculty-mentored research experience were to introduce students to research as a potential career option, involve students in the research process, and highlight that

meaningful research is an iterative process that takes time, consistency, and care. Moreover, students involved learned that research informs best practices, and that meaningful college curriculum is intentional and informed by research and practice. This is important given that students are often unaware of the work that goes into developing a course or an educational activity. Students were seen, heard, and valued by the faculty mentor who empowered them to become more active and involved in sharing ideas that gave shape and form to the project. The faculty mentor flattened the traditional hierarchy that exists in higher education which helped students feel invested in the project. Giving students a voice in the process of co-creating the experience resulted

in a powerfully motivating experience. Students were able to build a trusting relationship with the faculty member, create goals for themselves and the project, engage in self-exploration, and experience independence. This highly flexible, individually tailored experience gave research assistants time to focus on their own interests which included the impact of mentoring on students at HSIs, the professional needs of employees serving as mentors, best practices when mentoring vulnerable student populations, mentoring practices that result in institutional effectiveness, and research that leads to both personal and organizational change.

Conclusion

The Latina research assistants and faculty mentor involved in the project learned valuable lessons during this extremely meaningful experience. Specifically, mentoring is a human relationship where a more experienced person offers guidance, direction, and care to another which can result in decreased feelings of alienation, separation, and uncertainty about ability as well as increased sense of belonging for Latinas in higher education settings. Deemed an engine of social mobility by economists (Barshay, 2018), SEEK continues to support “the injured of our society” (CUNY TV, 2012) by providing faculty-mentored research opportunities to students who are often overlooked and underserved. Moving forward, the SEEK Department at John Jay College of Criminal Justice will continue expanding opportunities for students by providing high-quality mentoring experiences that positively impact Latina undergraduates interested in pursuing research as a possible career path. This body of work serves to improve the teaching and learning experience for Latina students and educators at HSIs and seeks to add to the literature about the importance of mentoring in higher education.

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