

Mentoring Hispanic Students: A Literature Review

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Luis F. Alcocer¹ and Andres Martinez¹

Abstract

The notion of mentoring can be understood as a one-to-one relationship between a mentor and a protégé. A more contemporary perspective of the term argued it as a collaborative environment where the mentor and the mentee can learn from each other. This document presents faculty attitudes and reactions on the role of mentoring. In the reviewed articles, scholars coincided on the idea that mentoring is an effective academic tool which impacts students' adjustment, retention, and achievement, and argued the development of peer mentoring programs as a resource for support during students' academic path in postsecondary education. We include cases of effective peer mentoring programs in higher education institutions, and highlight the fact of pairing students with similar interests is beneficial for both participants due to the establishment of an exchange of learning and knowledge. The authors also annotated the fact that some traditional mentoring models in education have typically excluded Hispanics and individuals of other underrepresented minorities (URM), as there is lack of availability of faculty with similar backgrounds. This article includes perspectives that Hispanic higher education students shared in regard to their expectations of a mentor. This review also shows successful cases of peer mentoring programs with Hispanic students, which considered the cultural capital of this specific minority, and its connection with mentees' expectations on outcomes from mentorship.

Resumen

Se argumenta la noción contemporánea de un entorno colaborativo donde el mentor y el mentado pueden aprender el uno del otro. Se incluyen perspectivas que comparten estudiantes hispanos en educación superior con respecto a sus experiencias de mentores. Casos exitosos de programas de mentoría de compañeros entre estudiantes hispanos, capital cultural de esta minoría y su conexión con expectativas de mentados y resultados de mentoría se comparten.

¹The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Brownsville, USA

Corresponding Author:

Luis F. Alcocer, Department of Teaching and Learning, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, One University Boulevard, Main 1.308, Brownsville, TX 78520, USA.

Email: luis.alcocer@utrgv.edu

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Mentoring is a particular process in which an experienced person (the mentor) guides another person (the mentee or protégé) in the development of his or her own ideas, learning, personal, and professional competence (Tareef, 2013). The traditional mentorship, based on the structure established in ancient Greece, has a connotation of a senior person assisting a younger person's career development through counseling, advice, and feedback as a one-to-one relationship (Bynum, 2015; Klinge, 2015). Modern mentoring has turned more collaborative, as it favors the establishment of relationships that provide experiential opportunities that build up a cooperative learning knowledge flow based on interactions (Bohannon & Bohannon, 2015; Klinge, 2015; Zachary, 2012). The formation of a collaborative network can be more beneficial to the mentee, as there are more mentors from whom they can get support, and flexibility and diversity in mentors that are involved in the formal or informal mentoring relationship are present (Bohannon & Bohannon, 2015; Bynum, 2015).

The mentor's role is to guide and help mentees to choose the right direction, and develop solutions to issues they might face; the dialogue mentor–mentee should challenge the mentee, and the mentor must provide guidance and encouragement (Bohannon & Bohannon, 2015). Mentoring can be a powerful growth experience for both mentor and mentee, as mentors will learn new things for their mentees and themselves (Zachary, 2012). Outcomes from a mentoring relationship include application of new knowledge in daily tasks, individual and collaborative analysis of new technologies, problems and possible solutions, and the creation of new pathways for learning (Klinge, 2015).

Mentoring practices have been found to be a particularly powerful way of increasing students' feelings of belonging to the school community when (a) personal compatibility was used as a factor in matching mentors and mentees, (b) mentors were matched one-to-one learners in large institutions, and (c) mentoring services include problem-solving sessions to help learners constructively address their conflicts with teachers or professors, school staff, and peers (Powell, 1997). Because mentoring practices have typically excluded individuals of less represented races, ethnicities, sexual identities, and social economic status, minority populations are even in more need of mentoring (Budge, 2006). Mentoring is critical at all levels of development, and research affirms the need for these relationships at every stage in the professional career of underrepresented minorities (Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015).

Mentoring in Higher Education

Mentoring in higher education and other fields has included faculty and/or staff members who provide mostly informal mentoring (Budge, 2006). Mentors model successful behaviors for protégés, and help clear the path to success identifying barriers along

the way, as they advise which behaviors to display for success and which ones to avoid (Knouse & Moody, 2013).

DeAngelo, Mason, and Winters (2016) stated that mentoring relationships are central to the successful functioning of higher education institutions; however, the lack of mentoring as a shared purpose of the institution creates a cultural barrier to its enactment, as it is usually not recognized as a component of the faculty duties. DeAngelo et al. found that faculty descriptions of engagement and interaction with students related to mentoring can be classified as either expected or extra-role behavior; this perception is aligned with faculty's personal experience in entering higher education, a sense of responsibility to the students, personal experience related to success or struggles in academia, individual sense of responsibility to mentor students as a part of their faculty role, and background or demographic characteristics. DeAngelo et al. highlighted that fostering mentoring relationships for all faculty members is an action that favors the generation of positive outcomes while mentoring students, and emphasized the relevance of the inclusion of job satisfaction, organization commitment, promotion, research publications, grant funding, and mentoring students' outcomes in the faculty periodic assessments.

Mentees almost always tied psychological support to instructional and professional assistance, as these functions appeared to be melded into one; having a clear understanding of how mentors can support beginners in a holistic way is critical for the retention of novices in professional and educational settings (Bynum, 2015; Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; Israel, Kamman, McCray, & Sindelar, 2014). When first-semester college students have a strong relationship with a mentor, they are more likely to be successful academically and in general when compared with those without this support (Lenz, 2014).

Peer Mentoring

McDonough and Brandeburg (2012) noted that many students entered college unprepared to meet the demands necessary for academic achievement and often struggle to accommodate preexisting learning styles and study habits. First-year college students rely heavily on peer support while acclimating to the demands of university life (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008). Peer mentoring is a key factor to the retention process when a more formalized mentoring program cannot be implemented (Bynum, 2015), as it emphasizes a network approach for sharing resources, and presumes that all participants possess distinctive assets to contribute to one another's development (Nunez, Murakami, & Gonzales, 2015).

Collings, Swanson, and Watkins (2014) stated that peer mentors could potentially act as additional support in a new environment, and thus buffer the effects of the transition, as they can help in adaptation and integration to the new environment, which will lead to higher education retention rates, and may safeguard new students from possible negative effects during their transition to higher education. Collings et al. explained that mentoring programs consisted of allocating a mentor for every freshman; these mentors were students from second- or third-year programs who volunteer

to assist on issues related to accommodation, course information, student services, and support in finding the way around to newcomers. Collings et al. indicated that non-peer-mentored individuals experienced decreases in self-esteem, whereas peer-mentored participants indicated no changes. Peer mentors provided advice on aspects of the hidden curriculum and information that could not be received through handbooks. Collings et al. also found that peer-mentored individuals showed a significant decrease on negative effects whereas the non-peer-mentored had no changes in the levels of affect through time. As Collings et al. concluded, peer mentoring appears to offer higher levels of integration to university and lower levels of intention to leave.

Horowitz and Christopher (2013) discussed the importance of peer mentoring to succeed in college and stated that mentoring contributes to completion of degree and success of future professional pursuits. Horowitz and Christopher argued that graduate students, who typically have not had formal training in mentoring, often served as the main contact in the laboratory and other settings for undergraduates; undergraduates indicate that they gained motivation and felt that the personal interaction with graduate students contributed to their academic success (Horowitz & Christopher, 2013).

The role of the peer mentor is often seen as having multiple functions—academic advisor, confidante, friend, study buddy, career advisor, support, and role model (Egege & Kutieleh, 2015). The functional role of the (peer) mentor raises two facets that are often neglected in the mentoring research: the relevance of the characteristics of the mentor on the effectiveness of the mentoring program in achieving its goals and the importance of mentor training. Egege and Kutieleh (2015) argued that mentoring, or specifically peer mentoring, plays a particular role in a college transition. However, not every peer intervention strategy will constitute mentoring, just as not any peer is a mentor (Egege & Kutieleh, 2015). A common operational difference between academic-focused peer mentoring programs and others is the embedding of the tutor/mentor into the subject topic tutorials where they work with a group of students on set subject matter; mentors chose mentees or were approached to act as a mentor based on their personal characteristics or knowledge, usually with no mentoring training. Egege and Kutieleh stated that to evaluate the effectiveness of mentoring programs as a retention strategy, some boundaries need to be set to ascertain how one initiative differs from others. A way of setting boundaries could be delimiting the scope of the mentor's role.

Mentoring Hispanic Students

In recent years, college admission rates in the United States for Hispanics has increased; however, the achievement gap between Hispanic students and other ethnic groups remains wide (Johnson, Simon, & Mun, 2014; Nunez et al., 2015; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Sáenz, Ponjuan, Segovia, & Del Real Viramontes, 2015).

Phinney, Torres Campos, Padilla Kallemeyn, and Kim (2011) conducted a study with the Hispanic freshmen undergraduate population in an urban university aiming to enhance college performance through mentoring. Their results outlined that having a good mentoring relationship was associated with more time with a mentor and

predicted the mentee's sense of belonging to the university. Phinney et al. also remarked on the fact that that mentors who established rapport with their mentees and spend time with them made a positive impact in psychosocial factors underlying academic performance of Hispanic Freshmen.

Rudolph, Castillo, Garcia, Martinez, and Navarro (2015) conducted a study on the U.S.–México border aiming to understand perspectives of Hispanic students with regard to mentoring. Rudolph et al. revealed that students perceive that their course work facilitated initiation of mentoring, and it was usually the student in need who approached the faculty or more experienced peer to initiate the relationship. Males and females reported that the relationship became increasingly reciprocal over time, and likewise, that the mentee took more initiative and developed greater self-efficacy (Rudolph et al., 2015). The qualities students reported as relevant in mentors are openness, common values, trust, availability, and commitment. With regard to the emphasis given to relationship qualities, males noted genuineness, knowledge, and expertise of the mentor, and females emphasized listening, guidance, and caring. Both male and female students noted language differences, and lack of knowledge about academic mentoring as barriers. Another barrier common to both males and females was social inequality. The border context, the lack of role models in their families, and the impact of the context on their educational and mentoring experiences were also remarked upon as relevant factors for the students.

Peer Mentoring in Hispanic Students

Peer mentorship programs have shared some degree of success in promoting the academic success of diverse underrepresented student populations (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). Concepts from cultural capital and community culture wealth are relevant to develop a peer mentoring program for Hispanics, which provides support, tutoring, and linkage to academic and student services, aiming to improve their educational experience, academic performance, and degree completion (Cox, Yang, & Dicke-Bohmann, 2014; Johnson et al., 2014; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

Cox et al. (2014) argued that the mentee's cultural background, collectivism sense, and comfort in dealing with people with power and authority are important aspects implicated in the effectiveness of a mentor relationship in Hispanic students, as that cultural orientation of the Hispanic mentee is an important predictor of the mentoring function that the protégé values. Cox et al. found that individuals comfortable in being close to people in positions of power desired a mentor who would act as a role model, as power distance has shown an association with student behaviors in the classroom, whereas individuals who are high in collectivism sense desired a mentor who would provide psychological support, as they perceive themselves as members of various in-groups and are motivated or forced to be members of those groups. The protégé's culture is an important component to take into account when considering the kinds of mentorship the protégé will seek, as well as the kinds of mentorship that will be effective for a given protégé.

Johnson et al. (2014) studied 135 male and 133 female Hispanic freshmen while participating in hands-on activities and simulations in environments that enable them to practice essential academic, social, and emotional skills; critical thinking; goal setting; decision making; time management; teamwork; and communication. Johnson et al. showed in their results that a peer mentoring program can be effective for improving graduation rates among Hispanic young men, especially those identified as at risk of school dropout. Johnson et al. also found that there are distinct benefits to providing support to all incoming students, not just those who are seemingly most at risk of dropping out of school.

Rios-Ellis et al. (2015) argued that despite the growing population of Hispanic students, little has been done to recognize the potential cultural assets and resilience that Latino communities and students can bring to the educational environment, and stressed that Hispanics continue to lag behind their African American and Caucasian counterparts in 4-year college and university enrollment and degree completion.

Although language is often viewed as a barrier for Latinos, linguistic capital is very beneficial and advantageous to Latino college students (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). The diversity of ethnically specific peer and faculty mentorship programs provides an opportunity for institutions of higher education to develop more personalized relationships with students and more readily respond to individual student needs beyond the classroom. Peer mentorship programs provide a pathway through which underserved Hispanic students can receive assistance from high-achieving peers who have undergone similar contextual experiences and understand firsthand the educational barriers one must overcome to achieve academic success (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

Final Comments

As established by Zachary (2012), mentoring is a process of engagement, no one can mentor without connection, and the relationship is more successful when it is done collaboratively. Mentoring provides the mentee with a safe situation to explore new ideas with confidence. It allows mentees to take a closer look at themselves, examine issues affecting them, and find solutions that are available (Bohannon & Bohannon, 2015). The success of a mentoring program includes support for one another, a shared vision of success, and the creation of a safe environment for personal and professional growth (Poel, Arroyos-Jurado, & Coppola, 2006). The commitment and engagement of mentoring partners are key to establishing, maintaining, and experiencing successful mentoring relationships (Zachary, 2012).

Egege and Kutieleh (2015) stated that if mentoring itself is not defined, and the type of approach is not explicated, it is not clear what would count as a benchmark program or what would constitute best mentoring practice. As commented by Egege and Kutieleh, at a minimum, one would need to know what the objectives of the mentoring programs are and what the functional role of the mentor is. Johnson et al. (2014) explained that young students were exposed to motivated and academically successful students in a structured setting, and thus benefit from observational learning and imitation of these peer role models.

For minorities, mentors provide genuine concern for their welfare, practice cultural sensitivity, and appreciate the unique individuality of the protégé (Knouse & Moody, 2013). Culture plays a strong role in shaping the mentoring functions that protégés desire (Cox et al., 2014). Several barriers have been identified that contribute to lower educational attainment among Latinos, including the lack of academic preparation, English language proficiency, and lack of knowledge of U.S. higher educational systems and the financial mechanisms through which to fund college (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

To gain empathy with mentees, mentors rely on similar experiences to understand mentees' issues (Bohannon & Bohannon, 2015). Based on Horowitz and Christopher's (2013) experience, the pairing of graduate students with undergraduates has proven to be a successful strategy for establishing a peer mentoring relationship that could work with Hispanic students. The specific values and goals play an important role in defining the mentoring relationship.

Hispanics may prefer Hispanic peers who understand Hispanic culture and values for social support and personal feedback. Sources for such peers could be college organizations, fraternities, sororities, and even Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs with a huge number of Hispanic participants, as Hispanics should look to multiple peer mentors to fulfill a number of mentoring activities. The goal of mentorship programs is to provide Hispanic educated students with culturally affirming and relevant mentorship and linkage to campus services, while facilitating a greater understanding and response to the needs of Hispanic students among many campus communities (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

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Author Biographies

Luis F. Alcocer, MBA, Office of International Programs, is a doctoral student in Department of Teaching and Learning, College of Education and P-16 Integration, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Andres Martinez, MEd, is a teacher in La Feria Independent School District and doctoral student in Department of Teaching and Learning, College of Education and P-16 Integration, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.