

The Review of Higher Education
Fall 2000, Volume 24, No. 1, pp. 87–102
Copyright © 2000 Association for the Study of Higher Education
All Rights Reserved (ISSN 0162-5748)

Clearing a Path for Success: Deconstructing Borders Through Undergraduate Mentoring

Dawn Wallace, Ron Abel, and Becky Ropers-Huilman

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
—Robert Frost

For many potential college students, the road to postsecondary participation is paved long before they enter the college gates. Their journey is marked by a path which has been occupied and made familiar by members of their families, society, and culture. For others, however, the path is less clear. Rela-

Dawn Wallace and Ron Abel, doctoral candidates at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, work with TRIO Programs and teach in the General Business Department at Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond. Becky Ropers-Huilman is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education and Women's and Gender Studies at Louisiana State University. Her research and interests focus on three strands—curriculum and college teaching, race and gender, and epistemology—particularly as each informs how higher education institutions and their participants can become more inclusive of diverse participants and perspectives. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education 1997 annual meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Address inquiries to Dawn Wallace, #2 Rosewood Place, Hammond, LA 70401; telephone: (504) 549-2348; fax: (504) 549-3477; e-mail: dwallace@selu.edu.

tives and members of their society have not traditionally attended college. Those students who walk the unfamiliar path and choose, through college participation, to take the road less traveled by their peers and family members may face many obstacles which threaten their persistence and completion of a degree. While a college degree is often considered the primary tool for achieving the American dream of "success," some potential students do not persist in that dream because they lack role models, encouragement, guidance, support, and financial resources. Others simply do not view higher education as an option, given their perceptions about who is eligible or welcome to participate. Many higher education scholars believe that mentoring can reduce the negative impact of barriers to successful college participation by facilitating relationships for students with someone who is experienced in navigating unfamiliar territory (Bruce, 1995; Dickey, 1996; Fant & Leftwich, 1996; McCormick, 1991).

Our purpose in this research is to examine students' interpretations of their involvement with some of the formal mentoring programs that serve first-generation, low-income students. Our research focused on federally funded programs, but university and community programs also sponsor formal mentoring programs. In this paper, we use "formal mentoring" to designate the deliberate matching of TRIO university personnel with students from historically underrepresented groups. While these relationships may not meet every component of the multiple definitions of mentoring, TRIO personnel are, by contract, mandated to mentor students in their programs. This study focuses on the nature of these relationships as the students understand them.

Our study provides a unique contribution to the literature in four respects. First, little has been published on *formal* undergraduate mentoring programs or their success, especially with underrepresented student populations. Second, several researchers (Anderson, Dey, Gray, & Thomas, 1995; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991; Peper, 1994) have urged that more attention be given to *student* perspectives about mentoring relationships; we accomplish this by listening to the stories of students. Third, we heard from our participants that many in the academic community are not well informed about TRIO programs and their powerful potential for mentoring the populations that they serve. Through this research, we hope to bring TRIO programs and their academic importance to students to the attention of a broader audience. Finally, we hope to "unite theory with practice in a manner that is emancipatory and transformative" (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993, p. 325). In this vein, we present theoretical stances that inform mentoring practices in higher education and, throughout the paper, suggest how educational practitioners and scholars can translate understandings derived from our work into practical applications.

First, we discuss the context in which the students in the study participated in mentoring programs. Second, we use critical theory and other scholarly perspectives to explore the implications of institutional programs designed to serve underrepresented groups. Third, we use qualitative interview data in presenting our results to illustrate the nuances of formal mentoring as perceived by the students in our study. Finally, we present our conclusions about the potential and the problems with formal mentoring programs in higher education.

CONTEXT

To facilitate the development of mentoring relationships in higher education institutions, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Higher Education, developed three student assistance programs in the late 1960s that collectively became known as TRIO programs. These programs, with a cumulative budget of \$600 million, currently serve over 700,000 students on college campuses across the country. Their primary goal is to increase the postsecondary academic success, retention, and graduation of first-generation, low-income students and students with disabilities. Mentoring is an explicit part of TRIO initiatives to counteract the constraints on historically underrepresented students.

The programs in our study strive to promote emotional, environmental, and academic acculturation into higher education environments through various forms of mentoring. This study focuses on services offered by three TRIO programs: Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Center, and Veterans Upward Bound. As context, we describe each program's goals and briefly narrate the experiences of three individuals whom they served. These narratives illustrate the wide range of backgrounds and life experiences that students in these programs bring to their college interactions.

Student Support Services

Student Support Services (SSS) works to ensure that students stay in college until they earn their baccalaureate degree. Participants, which include disabled college students, receive remedial tutoring, tutoring, counseling, and mentoring.

Abby (all names are pseudonyms), uses a wheelchair for mobility. Her family supported and nurtured her dream to achieve a college degree. Upon graduating from high school, she enrolled at a large, out-of-state institution; but her first year of college was so traumatic that she transferred to a smaller institution closer to home. After learning about SSS, she participated in it to help her overcome barriers like those she had faced at her previous institution. She credits SSS in helping her persist by providing "help

with teachers, giving me advice about classes to take, tutoring me, and just being there when I needed someone to talk to.” Through SSS guidance and her own perseverance, Abby is now in her senior year of her social work studies.

Educational Opportunity Centers

Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) primarily serve displaced or underemployed workers over the age of 17. These centers help individuals choose colleges and majors and help them understand their financial aid options. They also provide academic support and guidance through tutoring, mentoring, and counseling.

Eric, a recovering alcoholic and nontraditional student nearing college completion, first learned about EOC when he was living in a homeless shelter. He shared his story openly and spoke of EOC’s contributions, especially those of its professional staff, in redirecting his life.

I always thought about bettering myself, but did not think that I was college material. I guess I didn’t think I had it in me . . . My counselor helped me with everything. She helped me fill out forms and told me that I was good enough to do it.

As Eric told us how EOC has helped him through the turbulent times that he faced in college as a nontraditional student, he repeatedly voiced a strong affirmation about the value of this program.

Veterans Upward Bound

Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) offers services targeted to adult students who are military veterans. Participants in this program receive pre-college counseling and instruction in core curricula and assistance in enrollment, financial aid, and career counseling.

John, a Vietnam veteran who sustained a war injury, did not even consider college and worked as a construction laborer for more than 20 years. At that point, his injury became so pronounced that he could no longer keep his job. A veterans’ counselor recommended that he enroll in VUB to help him explore his career opportunities and give him guidance in job retraining strategies. After a thorough skills and career assessment process, the Veterans Upward Bound staff recommended that John attend college to begin a new career. The project helped him acquire Veterans Administration vocational rehabilitation funding to provide for his family and federal financial aid to pay for school. The project staff also gave John much-needed emotional and motivational support. He attributes his graduation and subsequent employment as an art teacher largely to this support.

While these individual accounts are unique, they are also representative of many students in our study. To participate in TRIO programs, students must be classified as: (a) low-income, meaning a family income below 150% of the U.S. Commerce Department's level for poverty, and/or (b) first-generation college, meaning that neither parent may possess a baccalaureate degree from a four-year college. Two-thirds of the participant population in these programs must possess both of these criteria. TRIO projects utilize mentoring as a primary service component.

Full-time professional staff members in TRIO programs are trained in strategies and practices that encourage student enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education. Their areas of expertise include enrollment, academic, financial aid, career development, and other forms of support counseling. Additionally, to facilitate mentoring, TRIO administrators are encouraged to employ staff members whose backgrounds are similar to those of the students they mentor. In fact, Abel, Wallace, and Ropers-Huilman (1999) found that most of the TRIO professional staff members employed in their study were either past participants of TRIO programs or would have met the requirements for participation. As defined in this context, mentoring is academic and personal support provided to students by persons who are committed to helping them succeed in their postsecondary educational endeavors. Because these programs are designed to provide assistance in students' collegiate experience, we wanted to determine the meanings students ascribe to their mentoring experiences.

PERSPECTIVES FROM CRITICAL THEORY

Critical theory, as related to our study, draws attention to: (a) the emphasis on the differences of societal groups and individuals, (b) the role of culture and power, and, (c) the goal of emancipatory action (Capper, 1993, 1998; McLaren & Lankshear, 1993; Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Through pointing out the ways in which individual and group differences affect opportunity and change, critical thought can help us understand the effects that socially constructed power relations can have on students' participation, success, and retention. Further, these critiques question "whether past and current practices address social justice and empowerment and whether those practices have a commitment to oppressed persons" (Capper, 1993, p. 13). Capper (1998) posits that an educational application of critical theory relies "on the involvement of disenfranchised people in dialogue to identify problems, causes, and solutions based on their own personal experiences" (p. 356).

In this study, we used critical theory to help us understand the ways that underrepresented students perceived their success as being enabled by a publicly supported system in higher education. We were particularly inter-

ested in how they interpreted differences in their relationships with mentors and, where possible, ameliorated them. Specifically, we wanted to examine a student population that institutions and the federal government have identified as needing assistance. We wanted to hear from students themselves how they interpreted their experiences with a specific type of assistance program. Critical theory urges the effects of social identities on relationships and opportunities. Consequently, we also wanted to ask students how race and gender affected their experiences in these relationships that were established to improve their success in higher education.

Based on these beliefs, we framed two research questions.

1. How do students in TRIO programs understand their relationships with mentors?
2. How did students in TRIO programs perceive that race and gender affected their mentoring relationships?

Mentoring Research

Studies on mentoring have sought to answer questions such as: What is mentoring and what are its key components in higher education settings? (Dunn & Moody, 1995; Gaffney, 1995; Peper, 1994; Terrell, Hassell, & Duggar, 1992; Valadez & Duran, 1991). How are students being mentored, and to what degree? (Anderson et al., 1995; Krueger, Blackwell, & Knight, 1992; Monaghan, 1993). Does mentoring have a positive impact on student success within and beyond collegiate environments? (Collins, Kamyra, & Tourse, 1997; Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996; Leon, 1997; Welch, 1996). And what are the implications of mentoring women and minorities in academe? (Dickey, 1996; Ervin, 1995; Garner, 1994; Heinrich, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991). Although the recipe for successful mentoring has yet to be found, researchers have gathered tentative depictions of mentoring moments. Most importantly, previous research questions have yielded knowledge about how mentoring relationships have influenced students' participation in and satisfaction with their college experience.

These themes from previous research on mentoring students provided our framework. First, studies show that students who interact frequently with faculty and other university personnel are more satisfied with their collegiate experiences than those who do not "connect" with faculty and staff (Bruce, 1995; Dickey, 1996; Endo & Harpel, 1982). Next, studies that focused on race and gender differences in mentoring report that majority males are mentored more frequently than women and minorities (Bizzari, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991). Further, some studies maintain that women and minorities are the best mentors for other women and minorities—if only there were enough to go around (Dickey, 1996; Leon, 1997). Yet some researchers (Collins, Kamyra, & Tourse, 1997; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991) report that matching mentors and mentees by race and/or gender may not be

necessary for successful mentoring relationships; while still others have found that cross-gender and cross-racial mentoring may produce instances of sexual harassment, discrimination, and unethical behavior supported by unequal power relations (Bowman, Hatley, & Bowman, 1995; Bruce, 1995; Dickey, 1996; Fant, Betz, & Leftwich, 1996; Leon, 1997). Because our participants were from underrepresented populations, we believed that awareness of these issues was important as we proceeded with our analysis.

Methodology

In this paper, we focus on student support programs and their mentoring processes because we believe that these programs have the potential to affect collegiate life—both positively and negatively—for underrepresented students. Through our interpretations of the meanings students ascribed to their mentoring experiences, we hope to make this analysis useful for scholars and practitioners who are interested in understanding the mentoring programs with which they are affiliated and in improving both the programs and also college students' experiences.

Our research draws on open-ended interviews with 20 students, ten participating in Student Support Services, four in Veterans Upward Bound, and six in the Educational Opportunity Center at a southern, comprehensive four-year, regional university. The interviews, ranging from 20 to 45 minutes, were audiotaped and transcribed. We spoke with six minority females, four black males, six white females, and four white males. Two had documented disabilities.

Our research participants reflect the larger TRIO population on the campus we studied. The university population of over 15,000 students is 85% White, 12% African American, and 3% other minority. Sixty-three percent are female and 37% are male.

FINDINGS

While eventually taking on many forms, mentoring relationships can initially develop either informally or formally. Informal relationships develop through student interaction with faculty, staff, peers, or others. These informal relations develop students' scholarly potential by teaching them "the rules of the game" and by providing vital information, experiences, and networking opportunities.

Our research asked how students in TRIO programs understand their relationships with formal mentors. In large part because some students are excluded from the power sharing that occurs somewhat spontaneously through informal relationships, formal mentoring systems were developed. The goals of these programs include supporting students' decisions to attend college and increasing their retention, academic performance, and satisfaction with college.

The federally funded project proposals and regulatory statutes of the student support programs in this study include mentoring as part of their programs. In talking with program staff and project participants, we determined that, at least for some students, mentoring does occur in these programs. While the staff and students may not describe their relationships as “mentoring,” these programs provide many of mentoring’s fundamental services. In this section, we review students’ perspectives about their relationships with formal mentors and, subsequently, with people they consider to be informal mentors.

Formal Mentoring Relationships

Critical theory teaches us that some groups have limited avenues of access to knowledge and, subsequently, to social institutions like higher education. We found that many students understood the value of receiving this crucial knowledge through mentoring relations. For several participants, these mentoring interactions began before they entered college and influenced their decisions to attend. Jesse, a Black veteran, described his reluctance to attend college:

I didn’t think I was smart enough. To me, a person who went to college was someone who had the ability to go to college. My father thought going into the service was a good idea. He just achieved a high school education. So if he had a college degree, he might have encouraged college. My program gave me an idea of some things that were possibilities for me when I decided to try for college. I’m not going to let [my children] go through life not knowing that college is an option. Maybe, high school should have a program such as this.

Mark, a Black student participating in VUB, indicated:

The program’s contribution to my entering school is probably 90%. It’s one thing to be told all you gotta do is this and that and then like most people you’re pretty much left on your own to battle the battles and try to achieve some end. With the benefits of the program, it was more like the steps were already there and I was guided through them. I felt really prepared to start school, and it’s those basic tools that have brought me this far.

Mary, a White student participating in EOC, appraised her program’s relevance to her decision to attend college and her persistence as, “on a scale of one to ten, I would say nine.” Finally, Judy, a Black EOC participant described the interactions she had with program staff at this university while attending another university. She stated, “I believe that the reason why I transferred here was because of the support I knew I would receive.” For several students, relationships with TRIO personnel helped them to see more options and possibilities in their lives.

Upon entering the university environment, the students in our study perceived that they were receiving at least some of the services typically associated with a mentoring relationship. The students looked to the TRIO staff as “insiders” who helped them remove barriers to their educational success and disentangle them from a myriad of initially perplexing institutional systems. From tutoring, to help with enrollment, to negotiating the financial aid office, the students in our study asserted that they had significantly benefitted from their participation with TRIO.

Carl, a Black participant in Veterans Upward Bound, stated, “Right off, I learned a lot of terminology about college that I had never heard of before. It helped me get over the culture shock. It seems like there is an answer here for everything.” Other students agreed that they had received a blanket of services that covered several aspects of their educational experience. As Eric stated:

[My counselor] basically did everything for me—forms that I had to fill out to get [financial] aid and get into school. I wouldn’t have been able to do any of that without her. I felt like “Uncle Jed” going to school. She would call and check up on me . . . She always encourages me. She has been fantastic, a tremendous asset. I know some people just do their eight-hour-a-day job, but she seems like she does it from the heart.

Several other students also told us that they learned how to negotiate the university environment from TRIO personnel.

Some of the students also specifically described how the program encouraged their desire to persist. Sherry, a White SSS student, commented, “It’s kinda like these people are a part of your family and you don’t want to let anyone down because they’ve helped you so much so far that you just want to keep pushing.” Other students also used the term “family” when describing their program’s staff. Jessica, a Black SSS student, stated, “It was definitely helpful. It kinda gave me a feeling of self-worth and like I wasn’t just a number. Like people really cared. It was like being a part of their family.” In addition, many students talked about how their program gave them “extra incentive” to persist. Mark stated:

This program [EOC] has given me more direction and a reason to stay in school besides just to go to school. It has given me more incentive. They always have time. Although they are busy, they will set aside anything just to make you feel comfortable. They make you want to keep going.

Finally, Jake, a Black student participating in SSS, believed that his mentors have often “cared more about my progress in school than I could. Especially those days when I’ve felt frustrated with the system.” These students understood and relied on their mentors’ support to make them feel both connected to others on campus and also responsible to others to succeed in their coursework.

We often heard from the students that the support programs had offered help with tutoring, provided note takers for classes, smoothed communication with other departments on campus, and counseled them for personal and academic reasons. By TRIO's definitions, these students were being mentored. Charles, a White SSS participant, eloquently expressed his feelings about the assistance he received:

It really does help because it takes a student and it gives you knowledge that you may never have had before or had a weak background in, and strengthens it and allows the student to progress on. It's more like training wheels. You put the wheels on so that you can learn to ride. Eventually you learn to ride the bike and can take the training wheels off and be just like everyone else. That's what Student Support Services does.

Perhaps the most poignant response regarding the value of formal mentoring overall came from Eric, a recovering alcoholic: "My self-esteem was so low, that someone would even want to help someone like me, it brings tears to your eyes, because you've been cast off all your life."

Although each of the students in our study reported positive relationships with their assigned mentors, each student's experiences with mentoring was unique. For example, Shane, a White SSS participant who was a low-income first-generation student who had grown up in an inner city, realized that his counselor, Ms. Vanessa, helped him. Still, he asserted that even without a mentor he would have found a way to make it through college because "I still would like to achieve this higher education. But, certainly by having people, key players, who have such a great ability to assist the student and have the image—someone you look up to—you respect their opinion." On the other hand, Eric's words suggest that he was passionate about the depth of support he received in his formal mentoring relationship, and that it had significant effects on both his academic career and life.

Informal Mentoring

While formal mentoring relationships are available to certain students through TRIO programs, students in our study also communicated the value they placed on informal mentoring. Informal mentoring can take a variety of forms. While some researchers found (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Anderson et al., 1995; Endo & Harpel, 1982) that the most beneficial informal mentoring in higher education occurs between students and faculty or staff within the students' discipline, most of our students did not have these informal relationships. As Karen, a Black EOC student, said:

I haven't really [connected with a faculty mentor] because to me it seems that the professors or instructors seem very remote. They're just there to instruct you in a good scenario. . . . It's not like you can look up to them for anything. It's like you're basically floating through class by yourself.

Most of our interviewees would have appreciated a mentor in their field of study. Mark commented, “A good mentor is someone who cares about you and is familiar with the field that you major in.” Carl also remarked:

I don’t have any mentor within my discipline. It would be helpful. I may use some of my instructors as mentors without there really being a mentor/mentee relationship. Being that I’m interested in education, I’ve looked at what my instructors are trying to show me and I try to look beyond the immediate lesson and try to figure out how this fits into the overall scheme of education in general because I would hope that a lot of their good qualities would rub off on me and I would transfer that into my work.

While students served by TRIO programs knew the value of informal faculty mentor relationships, thus far most of them had not successfully identified faculty mentors who were similarly interested in developing those relationships. Because students served by TRIO programs may lack informal mentoring relationships with people who are knowledgeable about and experienced in higher education, formal mentoring programs may fill a crucial role in the collegiate success of these students.

Race and Gender in Mentoring Relationships

The students in this study were not matched with like gender or race mentors. Rather, mentors were assigned based on the individual needs of the student and the availability of staff. Most of the students we interviewed had received mentoring services from one or more persons who did not match their race and/or gender. When we specifically asked about these relationships, several respondents stated that neither race nor gender significantly affected their mentoring experiences. Instead, most students indicated that the concerned and caring attitude of the mentors toward their students minimized differences.

Shane, a White student who was mentored by a black counselor, Ms. Vanessa, told us, “All my life, [race] was a part of our society; it was something that was reflected on me.” He protested, “The caliber of people, like Ms. Vanessa—how can you say this ‘Black woman’—when there is a level above that racial junk? I do not identify Ms. Vanessa as being Black, I identify her as being a professional.” Apparently, Ms. Vanessa’s professional approach disrupted Shane’s previous ideas about race. He underscored this attitude: “She is one of the very few persons in my life where [race] has not even crossed my mind.”

These students did not strongly reflect on race and gender differences when mentoring services had a positive impact upon their college lives. As Mark, a Black, said, “Race and gender did not matter in my case. I don’t feel that it would matter as long as [the mentors] are there to move me forward.” Clearly, at least in some cases, students in our study felt that race and

gender did not influence their abilities to have positive mentoring relationships with TRIO staff.

Although many participants reported that matching students by gender or race was unnecessary or made no difference in their mentoring relationships, some hinted otherwise. Students who felt that race or gender mattered may have developed this position because they had access to several different mentors who could serve various roles. For example, Cheryl, a Black SSS student, stated, "It would be hard to point out just one person as a mentor because several people in the program have helped me so much." When we asked her if race or gender mattered in mentoring relationships, she responded, "No, everyone here is helpful," but then added, "Sometimes though, I think that it's easier for me to relate to a female than a male."

Another comment about gender revealed students' awareness of power dynamics in higher education settings. Judy, a Black EOC participant, stated that she preferred to consult a female counselor for personal problems and a male counselor for administrative problems. When asked to amplify, she replied, "Men have that male dominance thing. I think they would carry more clout, to be totally honest." Her idea of matching a mentor's gender to the task demonstrates that some of today's students still encounter and are aware of subtle forms of gendered patterns of behavior or stereotypes. The different perceptions of race and gender issues provide examples of how students experience mentoring differently. Shane seemed to juxtapose Ms. Vanessa's professionalism with her Blackness. As such, he wanted to get above the "racial junk" in our discussion. Judy observed the perpetuation of distinct roles for men and women and believed that mentors and advocates of one sex or the other would have more or less power—and be more or less effective—according to the situation. Still, most students in our study stated that race and gender did not influence their relationships with their mentors.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

While our study offers insights into the values of formal mentoring programs, we recognize two weaknesses. First, the interviewees were identified and referred to us by the staffs of individual programs. Therefore, the interviewees may have been selected based on their positive experiences with the programs. Also, because of the small sample, we did not generate as much diversity of response as likely exists in these programs. Further studies could focus on a broader range of experiences and perspectives of students served by support programs such as the ones we studied here.

Critical theory suggests that our society consists of hierarchies that support the social realities of some groups while relegating to social borders the norms and values of cultures with limited power. This theoretical approach argues that positivist metanarratives exist and "purport to write a

story or set of rules characterizing positive knowledge” (Cherryholmes, 1998, p. 9). The dominant group metanarratives are concerned with the rational control of our lives, beliefs, values, and aesthetic sensibilities. They support the existence of a “grand truth” that is generalizable and applicable to all. Critical theory questions the idea of “rational” and argues that it is not possible to create one “truth” for everyone. Thus, we argue that an analysis of the borders surrounding broad social groups is useful, providing that such an analysis is complemented by exploring how each individual constructs and experiences those borders differently.

In this study, we focused on students characterized by their eligibility for federally funded TRIO programs—programs that identify students who are at risk of progressing through higher education in the “normal” way. We were most interested, however, not in looking at the entire group of participants, but rather at how specific students interpreted their mentoring experiences within this context. We wanted to know how the mentoring relationships formed between mentors and college students facilitated the crossing of social borders to “success” (however defined) in college.

From a critical perspective, education is not neutral. It is not simply passing on truth uninfluenced by the context of that truth’s origin and modes of transmission. Instead, because of the ways that truth and education are constructed at a given time and in a given context, participants (and potential participants) are positioned differently in relation to educational experiences. In the case of TRIO programs, some students are defined as at risk and therefore in need of services. What does this positioning allow and prohibit? What university practices result from the mentoring provided by TRIO staff members? And, most importantly, how do students experience those practices?

First, we learned, according to the students in our study, that mentoring facilitated students’ initial decisions to attend college and their subsequent enrollments. This finding is particularly important because it emphasizes the need for members of the higher education community to proactively seek connections with potential students, especially if those students are not aware of what higher education can offer them. These proactive measures not only expand the options available for students themselves but also enable those students to transmit knowledge and access to their families. As Jesse told us, “I’m not going to let [my children] go through life not knowing that college is an option.”

Second, we found that although students in our study indicated a desire for a faculty mentor, these relationships were simply not forming spontaneously. The complete absence of informal faculty mentoring relationships indicated a strong need for other institutional personnel to make connections with students. Until this happens, though, we heard from students that formal mentoring relationships outside a student’s academic field are

preferable to no relationships at all. However, we wonder: Does the availability of services like the TRIO programs discourage students from seeking faculty mentors, since they can “get by” with other assistance? Perhaps these support programs preclude students’ and community members’ insistence that faculty serve as mentors and that the university structure support faculty-student mentoring relationships. Krueger and her colleagues (1992) assert that universities can stimulate positive environments for faculty-student mentoring by providing training workshops, mentoring handbooks, and intern training seminars that set expectations for the components of a positive mentoring relationship. Such structures could enable both faculty and students to expect and desire mentoring relationships.

Third, our understanding of mentoring, as informed by literature, included the expectation that a one-on-one bond formed between an individual student and a particular institutional staff or faculty member. However, as the interviews progressed, we began to reevaluate this criterion because most students hesitated when we asked if they could identify one person as a mentor. Most students had developed supportive, nurturing, and insightful relationships with more than one staff member. Therefore, we concluded that many of these students were assisted through a network of mentors. In other words, different individuals provided various components of mentoring, all of which benefitted the students in our study. Formal institutional mentoring provided through student support programs can establish a large part of the network of care that students need to feel supported by their higher education institutions. Although the traditional definition of mentoring calls for one-on-one interaction, we believe that this definition can expand to include networks that provide a continuum of support tailored to the special needs of each individual student.

Fourth, we found that some students who were mentored felt a greater sense of obligation to remain in school because they perceived deep commitment from support personnel. If the relationship formed between a mentor and a protégé is a strong one, students may feel motivated by the relationship itself—rather than only by the information or support it provides—as a reason for remaining in school. Knowledge may equal power. Yet deep and consistent connections with others in a college environment also powerfully facilitate student success.

We have learned through this study that formal mentoring programs can have positive effects on students’ experiences in colleges. We are further convinced that those who have a commitment to mentoring can integrate into the higher education community individuals who were previously disconnected from the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in higher education contexts. We hope that higher education institutions will, in the future, better serve all students, thereby making these negotiations easier for mem-

bers of underrepresented groups. In this transition, we recognize the benefit of programs like TRIO. We hope that this research will encourage more questioning about the forms and effects of mentoring, while also furthering conversations about mentoring's important potential to change higher education and our society.

REFERENCES

- Abel, R., Wallace, D., & Ropers-Huilman, B. (1999, November). *Working in the margins: A study of professionals who serve marginalized students*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, San Antonio, TX.
- Aisenberg, N., & Harrington, M. (1988). *Women of academe: Outsiders in the sacred grove*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Anderson, G., Dey, E., Gray, M., & Thomas, G. (1995). *Mentors and protégés: The influence of faculty mentoring on undergraduate academic achievement*. Orlando, FL: Association for the Study of Higher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 400 761).
- Bizzari, J. (1995). Women: Role models, mentors, and carerers. *Educational Horizons*, 73, 145-152.
- Bowman, V., Hatley, L., & Bowman, R. (1995). Faculty-student relationships: The dual role controversy. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 34(1), 232-242.
- Bruce, M. (1995). Mentoring women doctoral students: What counselor educators and supervisors can do. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 35, 139-149.
- Capper, C. (1993). Educational administration in a pluralistic society: A multiparadigm approach. In C. Capper (Ed.), *Educational administration in a pluralistic society* (pp. 7-35). New York: SUNY.
- Capper, C. (1998). Critically oriented and postmodern perspectives: Sorting out the differences and applications for practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 34(3), 354-379.
- Cherryholmes, C. (1998). *Power and criticism: Poststructural investigations in education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Collins, P., Kanya, H., & Tourse, R. (1997). Questions of racial diversity and mentorship: An empirical exploration. *Social Work*, 42(2), 145-152.
- Daloz, L., Keen, C., Keen, J., & Parks, S. (1996). Lives of commitment: Higher education in the life of the new commons. *Change*, 28(3), 10-15.
- Dickey, C. (1996). *Mentoring women of color at the University of Minnesota: Challenges for organizational transformation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 399 838).
- Dunn, R., & Moody, J. (1995). *Mentoring in the academy: A survey of existing programs*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 396 599).
- Endo, J., & Harpel, R. (1982). The effect of student-faculty interaction on students' educational outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, 16(2), 115-138.
- Ervin, E. (1995). Power, frustration and "fierce negotiation" in mentoring relationships: Four women tell their stories. *Women's Studies*, 24(5), 447-481.

- Fant, H., & Leftwich, K. (1996). *A proposal to improve retention rates of culturally diverse students in the college and university setting using interpreters, go-betweens, and models*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 400 138).
- Gaffney, N. (1995). *A conversation about mentoring: Trends and models*. Washington DC: Council of Graduate Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 397 762).
- Garner, S. (1994). Mentoring lessons. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 22(2), 6-13.
- Heinrich, K. (1995). Doctoral advisement relationships between women: On friendship and betrayal. *Journal of Higher Education*, 66(4), 447-469.
- Johnsrud, L. (1991). Mentoring between academic women: The capacity for interdependence. *Initiatives*, 54(3), 7-17.
- Kalbfleisch, P., & Davies, A. (1991). Minorities and mentoring: Managing the multicultural institution. *Communication Education*, 40, 266-271.
- Krueger, J., Blackwell, B., & Knight, W. (1992). Mentor programs—An opportunity for mutual enhancement, growth. *NASPA Bulletin*, 76, 55-62.
- Leon, D. (1997). *Mentoring minorities in higher education: Passing the torch*. District of Columbia, Washington, D.C.: National Education Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 365 195).
- McCormick, T. (1991). *An analysis of some pitfalls of traditional mentoring for minorities and women in higher education*. Chicago: American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 334 905).
- McLaren, P. L., & Lankshear, C. (1993). Critical literacy and the postmodern turn. In C. Lankshear & P. L. McLaren (Eds.), *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis, and the postmodern* (pp. 379-419). Albany, NY: SUNY.
- Monaghan, P. (1993, February 17). An all-out effort to improve the quality of undergraduate life. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 39(24), A25-26.
- Peper, J. (1994). *Mentoring, mentors and protégés*. New Orleans: American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 376 124).
- Ropers-Huilman, B. (1998). *Feminist teaching in theory and practice: Situating power and truth in poststructural classrooms*. New York: Teachers College.
- Terrell, M., Hassell, R., & Duggar, M. (1992). Mentoring programs: A blueprint for personal growth and academic development. *NASPA Journal*, 29(3), 199-206.
- Tierney, W., & Rhoads, R. (1993). Postmodernism and critical theory in higher education: Implications for research and practice. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 9, pp. 308-343). New York: Agathon.
- Valadez, J., & Duran, R. (1991). *Mentoring in higher education*. Chicago: American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 331 451).
- Welch, O. (1996). *An examination of effective mentoring models in the academy*. New York: American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 394 464).