

Mentee's Interest in becoming a Peer Mentor as a Function of Perceived Quality of the Mentorship Experience

Michael J. Roszkowski, La Salle University, West Olney Ave., Philadelphia, USA
Phenix Frazier Badmus, La Salle University, West Olney Ave., Philadelphia, USA

Contact Email: roszkows@lasalle.edu

Abstract

One factor in a former mentee's decision to become a mentor is thought to be satisfaction with the mentorship that the mentee experienced when being mentored, but the issue has been addressed in only a few studies. We studied the relationship between interest in becoming a mentor and indirect indicators of satisfaction, namely the quality of the mentee's perceived experiences, among 509 peer mentored first-year college students who completed an evaluation at the end of the year. The results affirm that relationship, but the effect size is very small.

Keywords: mentee, interest, peer mentorship, engagement, satisfaction

Introduction

Peer mentoring is a supportive one-to-one relationship between a less experienced person (mentee or protégé) and a more experienced individual (mentor), who are of more or less equal status, engaged in some common endeavor. In higher education, the relationship is typically between a first-year student and a more advanced undergraduate. The primary aim of many such peer mentorship programs is to ease the transition from high school to college for the first year student (Colvin, & Ashman, 2010; Hall, 2007; Holt & Berwise, 2012). Surprisingly, there exists a more extensive literature on the benefits of mentoring than on why people decide to become mentors (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Research by Allen and her colleagues (Allen, 2003; Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997) indicates the presence of two broad motives: other-focused and self-focused. Other-focused motives involve the desire to be helpful and to create a successful enterprise. Self-focused motives encompass a desire for self-enhancement and self gratification.

Mentee satisfaction with mentorship linked to willingness to serve as future mentor

Intuitively, one would expect that a person's own prior experiences as a mentee may influence the decision as to whether to mentor someone else, but the empirical evidence to support this conclusion is limited because this issue has not been addressed adequately. In a review of factors related to willingness to serve as a peer mentor to a fellow college student, Terrion and Leonard (2007) reported that "only 1.9% of the reviewed articles specifically mentioned the effect of prior mentoring experience on a

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candidate's suitability. One study found that mentees who have had a positive experience in their mentoring relationship are likely to be more willing to become mentors in the future. p. 154." In the study mentioned, Allen, Russell, and Maetzke (1997) addressed this issue by asking 68 full-time MBA students to indicate agreement with the following statements: (a) "I would like to be a mentor to next year's MBAs" and (b) "I was (am) extremely satisfied with my assigned mentors." Answers to both statements were given on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Pearson correlation between answers to these two questions equaled .37 ($p < .01$), showing that a protégé's satisfaction is moderately predictive of stated willingness to become a mentor in the future. In view of the limited research on this matter, however, it is worth exploring the issue further, especially with undergraduates and by other means of gauging satisfaction.

Measuring Satisfaction

A number of approaches to gauging satisfaction can be used. As observed by Downing (1999), at the broadest level, one can distinguish between: (1) asking for satisfaction directly versus (2) considering aspects known to be related to satisfaction (i.e. proxy measures). A proxy is a surrogate or stand-in for the measure of interest which is highly correlated with it. The indirect (proxy) approach has merit for two reasons. First, satisfaction is thought to be a function of whether expectations are met (Bettman, Luce, & Payne, 1998; Oliver, 1997), but if the person had no prior exposure to the experience, the expectations may not be specifiable or may even be unrealistic (Westerbrook & Newman, 1978). Often, the roles of peer mentors in higher education are not clearly defined (Holt & Berwise, 2012). According to Benjamin (n.d), "Exactly what expectations participants have of mentors is not known. Since this is likely to be participants' first experience with peer mentors at the university level, they may not know what to expect and thus may be satisfied with the services they receive simply because it is all they know" p. 11. Secondly, another line of research (Borle, Dholakia, Singh, & Westbrook, 2007; Dholakia & Morwitz, 2002; Van Kerckhove, Geuens, & Vermeir, 2012) suggests that merely asking for a satisfaction judgment induces more favorable evaluations than may be warranted and triggers purchase intentions. Given the possibility of inflated statements of satisfaction and willingness to serve as a mentor when satisfaction is asked directly, it is worthwhile to consider some proxy measures when assessing mentee satisfaction, although admittedly even asking for indirect measures may produce the same bias.

Some authors distinguish between ratings of satisfaction and ratings of service quality (see Roszkowski, Baky, & Jones, 2005 for a discussion). Satisfaction measures per se generally ask for degree of satisfaction, whereas measures of service quality request ratings about perceived quality (using a response scale such as: excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, very poor, terrible). Service quality is considered to be the precursor of satisfaction (Brady & Robertson, 2001; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; Taylor & Cronin, 1994). However, the distinction between these concepts is not readily evident to the lay public (Iacobucci, Ostrom, & Grayson, 1995). Moreover, measures of service quality and satisfaction are intertwined and correlated (Taylor & Cronin, 1994; Sureshchandar, Rajendran, & Anantharaman, 2002; Tian-Cole, Crompton, & Willson, 2002). Typically, operational definitions of each of these two constructs tend to correlate to the same degree as different measures of the same construct (i.e. satisfaction or service quality), and sometimes instruments intended to measure service quality turn out to actually be better measures of satisfaction (Van Dyke, Prybutok, & Kappelman, 1999). Service quality questions can be at the detailed aspect (facet) level or global in nature. Two proxy measures of mentorship satisfaction, which can also be viewed as measures of service quality, are (a) frequency of contact and (b) mentor approachability.

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Frequency of Contact

According to Haggard and Turban (2012), mentorship constitutes a psychological contract between mentor and mentee, in which both have obligations. The relationship can fail if either party to this contract does not meet these responsibilities. A primary mutual obligation is that mentors and mentees maintain contact. The amount of time mentor and mentee spend together is a critical factor in the success of a mentorship (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Parra, DuBois, Neville, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002) as well as satisfaction with the mentorship experience (Allen, Russell, & Maetzke, 1997). For instance, in the context of a peer mentorship in college, Rodger and Tremblay (2003) found that improvements in grades occurred only if mentees met with their mentor at least once a month. A meta-analysis by Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) showed that mentorship programs with expectations regarding frequency of contact were more successful than ones without such expectations.

Approachability and Helpfulness

Compatibility between a mentor and protégé is essential for a successful mentorship (Goldner & Maysseless, 2009; Larose, Chaloux, Monaghan, & Tarabulsky, 2010). One aspect of compatibility is whether the mentee perceives the mentor as being approachable. Approachability, while a murky construct, has been identified as a desirable mentor characteristic for peer mentors in higher education (Crisp, 2009; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Nora & Crisp, 2007), as well as in a variety of other settings (Cahill, 1996; Clark, Harden, Johnson, 2000; Gray & Smith, 2000; Lima, 2004; Marshall & Gordon, 2005; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2010; Pitney & Ehlers, 2004; Rheineck & Roland, 2008; Rothera, Howkins, & Hendry, 1991). Predictably, research also identifies helpfulness as another characteristic of competent mentors (Allen, 2003; Penner, Fritzsche, Craiger, & Freifeld, 1995).

The fact that both mentor helpfulness and mentor approachability are related to successful mentoring can be explained in terms of the model of personality known as the Big Five. This prominent model of personality groups all human personality attributes under five broad dimensions: Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Openness, and Emotional Stability. Approachability and helpfulness both fall under Agreeableness. Lima (2004) and Turban and Lee (2007) maintain that willingness to mentor is related to the Big Five personality dimension of Agreeableness, which includes personality characteristics such as approachability, helpfulness, friendliness, etc.

Frequently, rating scales combine helpfulness and approachability (sometimes along with some other related descriptors), but some authors find multiple descriptors requiring one rating troubling because such an item might appear to be a double-barreled question (i.e. covering more than just one issue). Nonetheless, the practice of including approachability and helpfulness under a single rating is defensible because they are both manifestations of Agreeableness. Supporting evidence is available in a number of studies. For example, in a qualitative analysis of students' descriptions of professors, Basow, Phelan, and Capotosto (2006) identified various themes underlying these descriptions, with one theme consisting of the following descriptors: "approachable/accessible/personable/helpful." Quantitative support may be found in the work of Danaher and Gallagher (1997), which involved a factor analysis of customer satisfaction ratings and found that the attributes of approachable, helpful, pleasant, welcome and courteous constitute a single factor.

Perhaps that is why combining approachability and helpfulness is quite common. Nonstandardized instruments requiring a single rating on a Likert item with both approachable and helpful as the descriptor can be found (e.g. Drenna, 2002). Moreover, a number of popular standardized questionnaires contain

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items that ask for a rating on the combination of approachability and helpfulness. One such instrument is The College Student Experiences Questionnaire, which is an instrument intended to measure “the quality of student experiences, perceptions of the campus environment, and progress toward important educational goals” (<http://cseq.iub.edu>). It contains several items meant to capture a student’s perception of the quality of her or his relationships with other students, faculty, and administrators. These items are answered on a 7-point Likert scale with only the endpoints labeled verbally and which consist of multiple descriptors. For example, the anchor associated with the ‘1’ rating on the item concerning relationships with faculty reads: “*remote, discouraging, unsympathetic*” and the anchor for the ‘7’ rating is “*approachable, helpful, understanding, encouraging.*” These polar opposites reflect the Big Five agreeableness factor. A second example is the Library Client Survey, published by Insync, which is used worldwide to survey satisfaction among academic library users; it asks for a rating of agreement with the following statement:

“*Library staff are approachable and helpful.*” (<http://educationandlibraries.insyncsurveys.com.au/our-services/library-client-survey/>).

The third example is the Noel-Levitz Satisfaction Inventory (<https://www.noellevitz.com>), which is meant to assess college students’ satisfaction with the services provided by their institution. One such item on this questionnaire is: “*The instructor is approachable and helpful.*” Finally, it may be relevant to note that a Google search reveals that the terms are often used together. Entering “approachable and helpful” (in quotation marks) resulted in 18,700,000 hits and “helpful and approachable” led to 15,900, 000 hits.

Research Questions

Avoiding known biases with a direct approach to asking for satisfaction ratings, we sought to determine whether interest in serving as a peer mentor is related to a global measure of service quality and ratings dealing with two facets known to be related to satisfaction with mentorship, namely: (a) frequency of contact and (b) mentor approachability and helpfulness.

Method

Peer Mentorship Program

La Salle University offers a voluntary peer mentorship program to its first-year students. The mentors, who are formally trained for their role, are called “Big Es” and the mentees are known as “Little Es” (The “E” is an abbreviation for Explorer, the university’s mascot). The mentors are considered personal guides who can help new students navigate the system and provide real-world advice on how to be successful during the first year of college. Specific functions that mentors are expected to perform include: discuss transitional issues, connect new students with experienced students, recommend available resources, introduce mentees to co-curricular opportunities, assist with the registration process, discuss course selection and major changes, help orient new students to the city, and serve as positive role models. In the promotional material, the listed benefits for mentees (Little Es) include: have someone close in age to go to for questions, concerns, etc.; gain a sense of belonging and connection to their new home; become an active and integrated member of the La Salle community; learn campus and resources quickly and easily; alleviate nervousness and tensions associated with the freshman year; get to know students on campus and make new friends. Mentors and mentees meet during group sessions as well as on their own. At the end of the year, the mentees complete a questionnaire inquiring about their experiences

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Participants

Data from two cohorts (2009 and 2011) were pooled, resulting in a sample of 557 respondents (323 and 234, respectively). However, 48 cases had missing answers for at least one of the questions of interest, so only 509 cases were used in the analysis. The questionnaires were answered anonymously. In 2011 (but not in 2009) several key demographic questions were asked. The respondents were 36.25% male and 63.75% female; 14.34% were commuters and 85.66% lived in campus housing.

Survey

The survey contained several indicators of degree of contact between mentor and mentee, namely, whether the mentor and mentee had contact (a) before the start of the semester (“Did your Big E contact you before classes started?”), (b) during the semester (“Were you able to keep in contact with your Big Es during the semester?”) and (c) outside of class (“Have you contacted your Big E outside of class via email, phone, text, social network?”). Responses to these questions were on a two-point scale (yes or no). There was also a question dealing with the mentee’s perception of the quality of the relationship between mentor and mentee: “Did you find your Big Es helpful and approachable?” (response options: yes or no). The questionnaire contained a global service quality rating, which required the respondent to evaluate the quality of the mentorship as either: (a) excellent, (b) good, (c) OK, and (d) needs improvement. However, this question was only asked on the survey form used with the 2011 cohort (in 2009, this question was open-ended). The question dealing with the mentee’s interest in becoming a mentor was phrased as follows: “Would you be interested in being a Big E next year?” Permissible answers to this question were either a yes or a no.

Data Analysis

For variables common to both 2009 and 2011, the data sets were combined to increase statistical power. SPSS version 19 was used to analyze the data. Analyses involved correlations, crosstabulations, and a binary logistic regression.

Results

Correlations

First, we examined the relationship between interest in serving as a peer mentor and (a) the global measure of perceived service quality, (b) degree of mentor-mentee contact, and (c) mentor helpfulness and approachability on the basis of product-moment correlations. Separate analyses were carried out on the 2011 data and the 2009 data as well as when the two sets of data were combined (see Table 1). Recall that in both 2011 and 2009, the contact and approachability questions were asked, but the global service quality question was only asked in 2011.

In all instances, the correlations are low (ranging from .04 to .14) with only one correlation reaching statistical significance in 2011 and none in 2009. However, all four correlations are statistically significant in the combined data set. The magnitude of the correlations does not vary much across the three data sets, so it is clear that the reason why the relationship reaches significance in the combined 2009 and 2011 data is due to the larger sample size. It is notable that the global service quality rating in 2011 was not related to interest in becoming a mentor to any greater or lesser extent relative to the contact and approachability variables from that same year.

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Table 1 - Pearson Correlations between Mentee Interest in Becoming a Future Peer Mentor and Evaluation of the Quality of Mentorship, Degree of Contact with Current Mentor, and Mentor's Helpfulness and Approachability

Aspect	Year	Year	Combined
	2011 (n=290)	2009 (n=218)	(n=509)
Quality of Mentorship	.10	-----	-----
Contact Before Classes Started	.14*	.04	.10*
Contact During Semester	.06	.09	.09*
Contact Outside of Class	.11	.12	.11*
Mentor Helpful and Approachable	.10	.09	.11*

* $p < .05$

Crosstabulation

The point-biserial correlation coefficient of .10 between willingness to serve as a peer mentor and the global mentorship quality rating in 2011 bordered on statistical significance ($p = .075$). The relationship was therefore explored further by means of a crosstabulation (see Table 2). Descriptively, one can see a slight association in the crosstabulation of these two variables. Namely, the percentage of respondents indicating an interest decreased with the service quality ratings: excellent = 27%, good = 22%, OK = 19% and needs improvement = 10%. However, the relationship again does not reach statistical significance [$\chi^2(3) = 3.33, p = .343$] and the level of association is low (Cramer's $V = .11$). It is evident that the largest drop in interest in becoming a mentor occurred between the "OK" and "needs improvement" ratings. Therefore, the first three categories were collapsed into one and crosstabulated against the last. Even collapsing the data failed to make the relationship statistically significant [$\chi^2(1) = 1.78, p = .182, \phi = .08$].

Table 2 - Mentee Interest in Becoming a Mentor as a Function of the Evaluation of One's Own Mentorship Experiences

Interested in Becoming Peer Mentor	Evaluation of Own Mentorship Experience				
	Excellent (n = 73)	Good (n = 139)	OK (n = 69)	Needs Improvement (n = 20)	Total (n = 301)
Yes	27.40%	22.30%	18.84%	10.00%	21.93%
No	72.60%	77.70%	81.16%	90.00%	78.07%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

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Next, we considered the data resulting from combining the feedback from year 2009 and year 2011. Since the overall evaluation question was only available in the 2011 data set, it was excluded from further analyses. To the question of whether there was interest in becoming a mentor, 414 (81.34%) of the mentees replied “no” and 95 (18.66%) answered “yes.” The crosstabulations of answers to the proxy measures of satisfaction by interest in being a future mentor appear in Table 3. The mentees who expressed interest in becoming mentors were more apt to indicate that their mentors contacted them before the start of classes (78% vs. 65%), that there was contact during the semester (78% vs. 68%), and that they contacted the mentor outside of class (40% vs. 29%). Moreover, the mentor was viewed as more approachable and helpful by the mentees who showed interest in becoming mentors themselves (93% vs. 82%). All differences were significant based on chi-squared tests, but the effect sizes (phi coefficients) were small in all instances (.09 to .11).

Table 3 - Mentee Interest in Becoming a Future Peer Mentor as a Function of Degree of Contact with Current Mentor and Mentor’s Approachability and Helpfulness

Indirect Indicator of Satisfaction	Interested Answering Yes	Not Interested Answering Yes	$\chi^2 (1)$	p	ϕ
Contact Before Classes Started	77.89%	65.46%	5.47	.019	0.10
Contact During Semester	77.89%	67.63%	3.84	.050	0.09
Contact Outside of Class	38.95%	26.57%	5.76	.016	0.11
Mentor Helpful and Approachable	92.63%	82.13%	6.37	.01	0.11

Logistic Regression

In addition to the univariate chi-square tests, a binary logistic regression was run in which the four proxy measures of satisfaction served as the predictors and whether the mentee was interested in serving as a mentor was the criterion. The logistic regression can inform one about the relationship between the dependent variables and the independent variables, controlling for the other independent variables. The four variables, even considered together, only explained a small amount of variance in interest in mentoring, as evidenced by the low pseudo R squared values: Cox & Snell $R^2 = .028$ and Nagelkerke $R^2 = .046$.

One surprising finding was the poor classification of cases based on the logistic regression, although this is explainable. That is, when the cut value probability was set at .50 (default), all respondents were predicted to be uninterested. However, as Hosmer and Lemshow (2000, p. 157) explain, “classification is sensitive to the relative sizes of the two component groups and always favors classifications into the larger group.” Moreover, as they point out, the classification procedure creates a dichotomy on a continuous variable, such that under the customary cut point of a probability of .50, an individual with a probability level of .48 will fall into one group whereas another person with a probability level of .52 will be classified into the other group, despite the fact that there is little practical difference between these two probabilities. The problem is most pronounced when there are many cases near the cut point. Therefore,

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the accuracy of classification according to these authors should not be uncritically viewed as a measure of goodness of fit.

In our case, the problem was somewhat different, although it further illustrates the perils of relying on the default cut point of .50. Table 4 shows the probability distribution for the sample as a function of expressed interest in becoming a peer mentor. Inspection of this table shows that the highest probability of interest was .28 (corresponding to a .72 probability of no interest) and the lowest probability of interest was .06 (or .94 probability of no interest). In other words, there was nobody whose calculated probability of interest was above .50. Therefore, it easy to see why using a cut point of .50 resulted in zero people being classified as interested. Nonetheless, the computed mean probabilities of being interested in becoming a mentor were slightly different for the two groups, interested =.21 ($SD = .06$) and not interested =.18 ($SD = .06$), and this difference of 3 percentage points was enough to reach statistical significance [$F(1,507) = 14.16, p = .000, \eta^2 = .027$].

Table 4 - Distribution of Probabilities as a Function of Interest

Probabilities		Interested		Not Interested		Total	
Probability of No Interest	Probability of Interest	<i>n</i>	Percent	<i>n</i>	Percent	<i>n</i>	Percent
0.72	0.28	30	31.58%	71	17.15%	101	19.84%
0.75	0.25	0	0.00%	11	2.66%	11	2.16%
0.79	0.21	31	32.63%	117	28.26%	148	29.08%
0.80	0.20	6	6.32%	15	3.62%	21	4.13%
0.81	0.19	8	8.42%	35	8.45%	43	8.45%
0.82	0.18	0	0.00%	5	1.21%	5	0.98%
0.85	0.15	0	0.00%	1	0.24%	1	0.20%
0.86	0.14	5	5.26%	58	14.01%	63	12.38%
0.86	0.14	1	1.05%	3	0.72%	4	0.79%
0.87	0.13	8	8.42%	28	6.76%	36	7.07%
0.89	0.11	2	2.11%	13	3.14%	15	2.95%

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0.90	0.10	0	0.00%	2	0.48%	2	0.39%
0.90	0.10	2	2.11%	20	4.83%	22	4.32%
0.91	0.09	0	0.00%	2	0.48%	2	0.39%
0.93	0.07	0	0.00%	3	0.72%	3	0.59%
0.94	0.06	2	2.11%	30	7.25%	32	6.29%
Total		95	31.58%	414	100.00%	509	100.00%

The probability value one selects for the cutoff depends on whether one is more concerned about sensitivity or specificity, and it should reflect the relative costs of making false positive versus false negative errors. When the cut probability was raised to .81 uninterested and .19 interested (based on the overall proportion of uninterested/interested persons in the sample), then the logistic regression correctly classified 70.53% of the mentees who expressed interested in becoming a mentor but only 48.31% of the ones who did not. In other words, under these circumstances, the sensitivity was 70.53% (67 of the 95 interested mentees identified correctly) but the specificity was 48.31% (200 of the uninterested mentees identified correctly).

While it was anticipated that some of the predictors may not be significant since whether a predictor is significant or not depends on the other predictors present in the model and their inter-relationships, a perplexing result was that the omnibus test of model coefficients was statistically significant [$\chi^2(1) = 14.62, p = .006$], yet none of the Wald tests for the statistical significance of each of the four individual predictors reached the conventional significance level ($p < .05$) with all four independent variables in the equation. Multicollinearity is sometimes the cause, so phi coefficients were computed to assess the inter-relationship between the five variables (see Table 5). Overall, the associations between the variables were low. Inspection of this table suggests that this occurrence was not attributable to multicollinearity.

Table 5 - Degree of Association Measured by Means of Phi Coefficients

	Contact Before Classes Started	Contact During Semester	Contact Outside of Class	Helpful & Approachable	Interested in Becoming Mentor
Contact Before Classes Started		.23***	.16***	.15***	.10*
Contact During Semester			.21***	.41***	.09*

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Contact Outside of Class	.17***	.11*
Helpful and Approachable		.11*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Consequently, model simplification was tried, which began with the analysis of the performance of each predictor by itself in a binary logistic regression. That is, four separate univariate binary logistic regressions were run using each predictor by itself (i.e. without the presence of the other predictors). By itself, each predictor was significant (see “univariate analysis” in Table 6) in predicting willingness to serve. Next, a backward elimination (Wald criterion) process was applied, using a .05 significance level for predictor removal, and two predictors (Contact during Semester, Contact Outside of Class) were dropped on this basis.

With just two retained predictors in the logistic regression (see step 3 in table 6), the predicted probabilities for being uninterested took on just four discrete values: .77 (59.53%), .85 (24.56%), .89 (8.25%), and .94 (7.66%). Therefore, as should be expected, applying the .50 cut point again resulted in all cases being classified as uninterested since there were no cases with probability levels below .50. Setting the cut value at .81, however, resulted in the correct classification of 72.63% of the interested mentees and 43.48% of the uninterested mentees. The pseudo R values were not markedly smaller with just the two predictors, namely Cox & Snell $R^2 = .023$ and Nagelkerke $R^2 = .037$. In other words, the change from a model with all four predictors to one with two was minimal.

Table 6 - Results of Univariate and Backward Elimination Multivariate Binary Logistic Regressions

		Wald χ^2 (1)	p	Odds Ratio
Univariate	Contact Before Classes Started	173.91	.000	4.38
	Contact During Semester	4.33	.038	1.74
	Contact Outside of Class	172.66	.000	4.36
	Helpful & Approachable	170.45	.000	4.29
Multivariate Step 1	Contact Before Classes Started	2.80	.094	1.59
	Contact During Semester	0.21	.650	1.14
	Contact Outside of Class	2.53	.112	1.48
	Helpful & Approachable	3.07	.080	2.16
Multivariate Step 2	Contact Before Classes Started	3.09	.079	1.62
	Contact Outside of Class	2.80	.090	1.51
	Helpful & Approachable	3.93	.047	2.30
Multivariate Step 3	Contact Before Classes Started	4.00	.046	1.72

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The perception of the mentor as approachable and helpful was critical. The odds ratio from the univariate binary analysis shows that mentees who considered their mentors as approachable and helpful are 4.3 times more likely to be interested in becoming mentors themselves relative to the mentees who did not find their mentor to be such. Controlling for whether there was contact between mentor and mentee before classes, mentees who perceived their mentors as helpful and approachable are 2.5 times more likely to be interested in becoming mentors themselves relative to mentees who do not see their mentors as possessing these characteristics.

Discussion

The reasons underlying the decision to become a peer mentor have been studied to a more limited extent than other aspects of mentorship (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). The study by Allen, Russell and Maetzke (1997) with MBA students found that there is a correlation between satisfaction with one's own mentorship experience as a mentee and willingness to become a mentor to others in the future. Our contribution to a fuller understanding of this relationship consisted of studying undergraduates and examining how interest in serving as a peer mentor relates to more indirect indicators (some would say precursors or determinants) of satisfaction. First, we looked at the correlation between the mentees' evaluation of their own mentorship (excellent, good, OK, needs improvement) and expressed interest in serving as a peer mentor. Next, we examined if interest in becoming a peer mentor was a function of whether there was a perception of adequate contact and whether the mentor was viewed as approachable and helpful.

Our results, based on first year undergraduates, are only somewhat consistent with the results obtained by Allen and her colleagues. We too found that interest (willingness) to serve as a peer mentor was associated with whether the mentorship experience was judged to be a positive one. However, our point-biserial correlation was markedly lower than the Pearson correlation derived by Allen et al, namely, $r = .10$ versus $r = .37$ (significance of the difference: $p = .035$). The reason for this difference is unknown. Perhaps it involves the fact that Allen et al studied graduate students whereas we looked at first year undergraduates. It may also be due to the nature of the satisfaction question. Our measure concerned service quality (i.e. the term satisfaction was not part of the question stem or the response options), whereas Allen et al measured satisfaction per se. Recall that Cronin and Taylor (1992) found that service quality was the antecedent of consumer satisfaction, and that consumer satisfaction had a greater impact on future purchase intentions than did service quality. If one conceptualizes becoming a future mentor as a purchase intention, then the lower correlation we found relative to Allen et al makes sense from this perspective.

The magnitude of the relationships between interest in becoming a mentor and the proxy measures of satisfaction were in the same range (.09 to .11). Mentees who indicated that they had greater contact with their mentors were more interested in becoming a mentor in the future. Furthermore, mentees who perceived the mentor to be approachable and helpful were more likely to indicate such interest. In terms of a multivariate model, whether the mentor was perceived to be approachable and helpful was the variable that we found to be most highly related to interest in becoming a mentor. Perhaps this is because approachability determines the amount of contact the mentee has with the mentor. Low approachability leads to low levels of contact and vice-versa.

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The implications of the results from this study are two-fold. First, it appears that a successful mentorship experience is no guarantee that the mentee will be willing to serve as a mentor. While we found evidence that if a mentee reports a successful mentorship experience, he or she is also somewhat more apt to express interest in becoming a mentor, there must be other more important factors in that decision, given the low effect sizes we obtained. We suspect that students are predisposed to become peer mentors or not become peer mentors based on their other-focused and self-focused motives (see Allen, 2003, 2007). The quality of their mentorship experience as mentees may sway this motivation to some degree, but the predisposition exists prior to the experience. It is even possible that students who were willing to serve as mentors may be favorably predisposed to see their own mentoring experiences in a favorable light from the start, irrespective of the quality of the actual experience. One has to wonder if a negative experience as a mentee for someone predisposed to becoming a mentor has more of a demotivating effect than a positive experience has a motivating effect on someone who is not predisposed to become a mentor. We suspect that it is the former, but admit that it is mere conjecture and propose this as a question worthy of investigation.

The low level of expressed interest in becoming a peer mentor is disturbing, but it requires further substantiation in other institutions of higher education. The actual pool of potential peer mentors may even be lower than stated interest suggests in light of the possibility that expressions of interest may not translate to actual behavior. With regard to this matter, Allen (2007, p. 138) writes: “Although a body of research has begun to develop examining intention to mentor to others (i.e., willingness to mentor)... no studies have examined the extent to which intention to mentor others subsequently relates to actual future mentoring behavior. Although intention has been found to be a valid predictor of future behavior in areas such as turnover ... it is not clear to what extent the intention-behavior link generalizes to mentoring behavior. For example, it is possible that because of the effort mentoring others requires, the relationship between intention and behavior with regard to mentoring others may not be as strong as that observed with other constructs, such as turnover.”

Second, the results are instructive from a methodological standpoint. Our data serves as a good illustration of the perils of relying on default values in statistical packages. Using the .50 cutoff led to a dead-end. We would advise researchers to not blindly accept the default values in logistic regression (or other) software packages. One needs to explore the nature of the data, such as the probabilities of group membership. The cut-point decision should consider the tradeoff between sensitivity and specificity and the severity of false positive and false negative errors.

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Michael J. Roszkowski, PhD is the Assistant Provost for Evaluation Services at La Salle University and Phenix Frazier Badmus, M.Ed. is the Assistant Director, Academic and Learning Support Services at the same institution.