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**Institutional Mentorship for Bridge Program Students:
Fostering Meaningful Engagement**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationships between at-risk, bridge program students and institutional mentors. The purpose of this dissertation was to learn more about the ways that bridge program students' relationships with institutional mentors may (or may not) influence students' development of academic confidence and campus engagement. Bridge programs are designed to foster student mentoring relationships with both faculty members who teach within the programs, as well the administrators and staff members (usually student affairs professionals) who run the program. Thus far, the research on bridge programs has been overly focused on predictive student attributes and quantitative outcomes (e.g. GPA or retention rates); this dissertation expands the research on practitioner approach to at-risk student mentorship, offering insight into the methodology of mentorship and how at-risk students experience such methodology.

A qualitative case study approach was utilized to achieve an understanding of both sides of a mentoring relationship and a close look at what strategies are employed by mentors who work with at-risk students, how students respond to those methods and approaches, and how at-risk students understand their experiences in the bridge program and with their mentors. This study includes an exploration of practitioners' equity-minded (Bensimon, 2007) approaches within the bridge program and within the mentoring relationships established with students. Findings from this study suggest that program design may foster the development of meaningful mentoring relationships between practitioners and at-risk students; further, findings suggest that practitioners' use of equity-minded approaches and focus on student self-authorship (Magolda, 2008) may encourage academic confidence and campus engagement among at-risk students.

Keywords: Bridge, mentorship, at-risk, engagement, academic confidence, equity-mindedness.

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Finally, I would like to thank the participants in this study for all their time and candor in relaying their experiences to me. I was truly inspired by your stories, your dedication and your perseverance, and I have learned so much from you.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to our daughter, who was with me through the last few months of this journey, motivating me through each trimester and kicking with encouragement throughout my defense. I can't wait to tell you all about it.

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Institutional Mentorship for Bridge Program Students: Fostering Meaningful Engagement

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background and Context

While remediation programs for college students can be traced back to the 1800s when college access was extended to populations of “common men,” what we now describe as the modern bridge program began to develop in the 1960s (Kezar, 2000). Bridge programs, a type of new student intervention designed to help students transition to college level work, were modeled after the TRIO programs of the 1960s that were created in response to educational inequity between differing socioeconomic statuses (Sablan, 2013). Bridge programs are noted as one of the first strategies implemented to improve college student retention (Garcia, 1991). The goal of bridge programs is to help students acclimate to the campus environment while developing the academic skills necessary to help them succeed. Over time, bridge programs have evolved as a way to increase access to higher education for traditionally at-risk or underrepresented groups who meet various criteria: some programs target first generation students or underrepresented minority populations, while others admit students who have not met the academic criteria for admission to the institution (Contreras, 2011). Traditionally, bridge programs provide supplemental support to these students as they attempt to navigate collegiate academics. This support comes in various forms of academic advising, peer support, tutoring, and enrichment activities.

While these programs were originally developed in the late 1960s, they have grown in popularity recently as higher education has paid more attention to broadening access for diverse students (Menton & Wang, 2013). A new question on the 2015 *Higher Education Research*

Institute (HERI) report on The American Freshman asked first year college students about summer bridge programs: 5.6% of students reported participating in a summer bridge program, and 68.6% of these bridge program students come from families with an annual income below \$100,000 (Eagan et al., 2015). Large constituents of summer bridge students were interested in one of the STEM fields (49.9%) and the majority of summer bridge students (68.2%) identified as non-white (Eagan et al., 2015). Weiss (2001) notes that students welcome the better odds bridge programs provide to attend their top choice institutions, while the institutions themselves can – potentially and theoretically – enroll more, and more diverse student populations in their academic programs.

Problem Statement

Historically, institutions have targeted at-risk student populations for participation in bridge programs in order to broaden access for those students who struggle to remain and progress in college (Sablan, 2013). Many summer bridge programs characterize ‘at-risk’ as academically under-prepared, first-generation, low-income and/or minority students. The Pathways Summer Bridge Program (PSB) at Arizona State University, for example, targets first-generation and minority students (Suzuki et al., 2012), while the Women in Applied Science and Engineering (WISE) Summer Bridge Program supports incoming female engineering majors (Fletcher et al., 2001). The programming and curricula of summer bridge programs are designed to provide the necessary academic skills, professional support and social integration in order to help students succeed in college and attain a college degree (Patel & Vasudevan, 2012).

As summer bridge programs have become increasingly popular in efforts to expand access to at-risk student populations, research has grown as well in analyzing program outcomes with particular attention to retention (Sablan, 2013). Studies have produced varied results; many

programs have proven successful in efforts to integrate and retain students while others have found no significant effect in increasing retention (Sablan, 2013). As Walpole et al. (2008) describe, research on bridge programs has not consistently shown a correlation of program participation with academic achievement or retention. The University of Arizona's New Start Summer Program (NSSP) was shown to directly and positively affect student retention when compared to a control group (Cabrera et al., 2011), but a study of eight institutions in Texas found no difference in achievement or persistence between bridge program participants and a control group (Barnet et al., 2012). There has been no conclusive evidence in assessing the overall value of bridge programs as a tool to boost access and enrollment. Given that bridge programs are implemented in varying ways across institutions, inconsistent results might be expected.

Although programs of all sorts are grouped under the umbrella term of 'bridge,' the way that support is offered to students differs from program to program. The selection of core classes, for example, might include English Composition at one institution and Introduction to Sociology at another. Social activities might be well-planned and mandatory in one bridge program, while they are optional and less defined in a different program. Some programs include credit-bearing courses, while others offer basic skills workshops; some programs work with high school juniors, while others cater to conditionally admitted college students, whose admission to the institution depends on their success in the bridge program or in the subsequent semester. Some bridge programs are residential; others have students commute to campus; some are a few days long while others last multiple weeks or months. However, there is a basic, general structure for bridge programs: most involve a required, overnight residential experience, one or two core curricular classes, an academic skills workshop, supplementary tutoring, instruction and

advising, and a social integration component which encourages participation in the campus community (Patel & Vasudevan, 2012). Additionally, there are certain program characteristics, which are common to all bridge programs: they aim to serve at-risk students (e.g. racial/ethnic minority students, low-income students, academically underprepared students, student-athletes, among others) and they offer support structures in various forms (e.g. peer mentors, skill seminars, supplemental instruction, advising, tutoring, social activities) in order to promote students' retention and success in college. Offering mentorship or access to mentorship in some way is almost always a component of bridge program support structures (Michael et al., 2010).

Much of the research on the effect of bridge programs has placed overemphasis on students as the agent and on the activities in which students are engaged, but has overlooked the institutional agent (faculty and staff)-student relationship that impacts student success (Bensimon, 2007). Most of the research collects data from students with regard to their attributes, perceptions, and behaviors with little focus on the practices, behaviors and perceptions of practitioners who play a pivotal role in fostering student development and learning (Bensimon, 2007). Therefore, in order to better understand the influence of bridge programs it is important to look at the role institutional agents play in implementing and sustaining these programs to create effective learning environments for students. More information is needed to examine the way that students and their bridge program mentors build relationships, and how those relationships influence students' experiences at the institution. If there are numerous variations on one general formula for summer bridge programs, and there is an inconsistency of effectiveness, then it seems logical that certain components help foster student achievement and retention while others do not. For summer bridge programs, the inconsistency of the research is potentially indicative of its incomplete nature. The focus of the literature needs to veer away

from student attributes and pay more attention to the role of the practitioner as it influences student experiences.

Most of the empirical research on summer bridge programs has consisted of outcome studies, focusing on program impact upon academic achievement in the form of GPA and/or credit hours, and retention. The research on bridge programs frequently comes in small scope, as in the case of Suzuki et al.'s study of the PSB Program (2012) or Cabrera et al.'s study of NSSP (2013). Both of these studies, as well as others (e.g. Strayhorn, 2011; Walpole et al., 2008; Fletcher et al., 2001) offer insight into the success or failure of one specific bridge program to keep students enrolled. Researchers have approached these studies in different ways, with some (Walpole et al., 2008) examining the way that the bridge program affected student goals and achievements, while others (Fletcher et al., 2001; Cabrera et al., 2011) document the way that bridge programs affect retention and GPA. Even the more broadly based studies (Garcia, 1991; Barnett et al., 2012) have examined multiple programs across different institutions, but have remained focused on the impact of the programs. Although this line of research is helpful to each individual institution (or system of institutions, as in the case of Barnett et al., 2012 and Garcia, 1991), it still leaves the evidence on summer bridge programs incomplete: these studies using retention rates or GPA to measure effectiveness fail to provide information about *how* a program achieves or fails to achieve results and *how* students are influenced by its institutional agents.

Further, much of the information currently available on the implementation and structure of bridge programs comes from student satisfaction surveys conducted by practitioners who are directly involved with the programs (Cabrera et al., 2013). This is problematic not only because of the informality of the research, but also because those conducting the research are inevitably challenged to be impartial, given their own investment in the success of their programs (Cabrera

et al., 2013). There is a need for more scholarly attention to the strategic (or not strategic) implementation of bridge programs in order to determine what aspects of a program drive student engagement.

While little empirical research has been conducted on the implementation of summer bridge programs, one key component that appears consistently in practitioner-based satisfaction surveys is the student relationships formed with program faculty members and administrative staff (Walpole et al., 2008). Most programs (Suzuki et al., 2012; Santa Rita & Bacote, 1997; Garcia, 1991; Strayhorn, 2011; Cabrera et al., 2011; Fletcher et al., 2001) employ some kind of structured mentoring or advising. Some theories of student retention, including Vincent Tinto's theory of institutional departure, postulate that increased faculty interaction, and specifically this program component of academic advising and counseling, are crucial to helping college students persist and thrive in college (Suzuki et al., 2012). However, this component of bridge programs has not yet been researched in any depth. While some studies (Walpole et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2011) have examined the ways in which students feel comfortable interacting with faculty as a result of bridge programs, little research has examined how creating meaningful, sustained mentoring relationships with faculty or administrators can be a pivotal factor in any student's success; research examining this part of program implementation from the practitioner viewpoint is even more scarce. As Wilcox et al. (2005) point out, social support, in the form of trusted campus relationships is essential for students adjusting to campus because those relationships can help students build self-esteem and feel more in control in a new, intimidating place. Thus understanding how these relationships between students and institutional mentors are established during the bridge program and how they are maintained afterward is critical to understanding if and why programs help students to become engaged in the campus environment. Research must

go beyond student satisfaction surveys and descriptive statistics using GPA as proxy and student self-reported data, and expand to include the dual perspectives of practitioners and students as they form potentially influential relationships.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the ways that bridge program students’ relationships with institutional mentors may (or may not) influence students’ development of academic confidence and campus engagement. It should be noted here that the term ‘mentor’ is distinguished from that of ‘advisor’ within this study (see Table 1). As Mertz (2004) describes, academic advising can sometimes include mentoring, but by definition, a mentor takes on a higher level of involvement and investment with the mentee than does the advisor, who is at least in some way, obligated to maintain the advising relationship out of official duty. While some academic advisors may become mentors, mentoring involves a deeper level of commitment to the mentee’s future – beyond, for example, the student’s imminent registration period, which is often the academic advisor’s primary concern (Mertz, 2004). Additionally, the typical student-advisor set-up is rooted in a supervisory capacity, while a mentoring relationship has in some ways transcended that factor; although mentors may still be supervisors in higher education through the role of instructor, advisor, etc., a mentor’s intent and involvement with the student’s development goes beyond supervision for duty’s sake (Mertz, 2004). Career advancement and psychosocial support are often noted as essential elements to a mentoring relationship (Ehrich et al., 2004); for the purposes of this dissertation, career advancement will be translated to student development, especially in the form of academic confidence and student engagement.

Table 1: Distinction Between Mentor and Advisor

| Mentor | Advisor |
|---|---|
| Maintains relationship out of commitment to the mentee’s future | Obligated to obtain the relationship out of official duty |

| | |
|--|--|
| Counsels mentee beyond necessary supervisory or disciplinary elements; imbalance of power not a factor in relationship | Often has some kind of supervisory (or disciplinary) role in mentee's life |
| Provides career advancement (student development) advice and psychosocial support | Counsels student only on matters as assigned by organizational duty |

Sources: (Ehrich, 2004; Mertz, 2004)

Bridge programs are designed to foster student mentoring relationships between both the faculty members who teach within the programs, as well as the administrators and staff members (usually student affairs professionals) who run the program. It is important to go beyond a student satisfaction level of research and examine the practitioner methods and approaches by way of data gathered from program mentors triangulated with student generated data. This study helps to provide insight into the best approaches for mentoring at-risk college students in bridge programs and how those strategies might be used in various bridge programs to support students. This research will help institutions to understand how successful relationships are built during the bridge program from the perspective of both the student and the practitioner, and the ways in which those relationships may influence students' academic experiences. The purpose of this study is to better understand how institutional mentors within bridge programs approach their important work with students, how those approaches are perceived by students, and the ways that mentorship may influence student engagement and the development of academic confidence. For the purposes of this study, student engagement is defined as the coming together of the student and the institution to foster a relationship between them which fuels academic and social development, and academic success for the student (Kuh, 2001); academic confidence is defined through self-efficacy theory as the feeling of confidence in both ability and preparation to succeed at an academic task (Sander & Sanders, 2006). These concepts will be expanded upon in Chapter 2.

Significance of Study

It is essential that research examines bridge programs in this way so that we can learn more about not just the overall influence of a program, but also about best practices for supporting at-risk students enrolled in these programs, who have put their college futures in the hands of bridge program practitioners. If bridge programs can successfully expand college access to at-risk or underrepresented groups of students, it is essential that program design is informed by rich data on practitioner methodology and student experiences with that methodology to ensure positive student outcomes. The mere existence and proliferation of bridge programs is not enough evidence that bridge programs are the answer to expanding access and increasing diversity: we must learn how to best implement practitioner strategies for at-risk students in these programs so that institutions can be accountable for the roles they play in the equation of student success.

Research validates the value of college students developing mentoring relationships with upper class peers, program staff and faculty members; previous studies include anecdotal evidence of bridge program students' commenting on the importance of these relationships to students' success, usually as a side note to data on GPA and retention rates (Kallison & Stader, 2012; Contreras, 2011; Keim et al., 2010). Research on non-bridge students confirms the positive impact that mentoring relationships can have on student success: for example, a 2015 study of Latino/a students at a community college found that students' interactions with "institutional agents" (p. 62) positively influenced their intentions to persist and succeed in college (Tovar, 2015), while in a very different model, a 2011 study of students who were provided academic coaches from an outside vendor showed higher graduation rates for students with coaches than those without coaches (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). While some research has investigated student

expectations when it comes to institutional mentors (Propp & Rhodes, 2006), few others have investigated actual strategies employed by practitioners. However these studies (Schreiner et al., 2011; Engstrom, 2008) did not target at-risk students or students in transition, those who may be in greatest need of mentoring support.

More research on the ways that bridge program mentors may form meaningful bonds with at-risk students and how those bonds may contribute to student success would allow bridge programs to be more effective in the way that they support at-risk college students. The body of research focusing on mentoring from the perspective of the practitioner is severely lacking; thus far, researchers have often overlooked or underestimated the practitioner's potential role in student development. The process of growing academic confidence and becoming engaged with an institution cannot be fully understood by simply examining student attributes and quantitative outcomes like GPA or credit acquisition. This study adds to the current research, offering a more comprehensive look at the institutional mentor-aided process of student development.

It is vital that as the number of bridge programs increases, they do so strategically, so that bridge program students have a chance not just at admission, but at success and completion in college. This bridge program research can inform decisions regarding program structure and practitioner approach to student development, and help institutions create more strategic, effective implementation plans for their bridge programs.

Research Questions

This dissertation intends to answer the following research questions:

1. How does a summer bridge program foster mentoring relationships between students and institutional agents?
 - a. What policies, practices, and/or structures are in place to foster mentoring relationships?

- b. In what ways do a program's components or conditions facilitate student-mentor interactions?
- 2. How do mentoring relationships developed in the context of a bridge program influence program participants' academic confidence and campus engagement during college?
 - a. What approaches and methods are employed by mentors in working with bridge program students?
 - b. How do mentors describe their influence on students' development of academic confidence and campus engagement?
 - c. How do students describe their experience working with mentors and their mentoring relationships?
 - d. How do students describe the role of mentors in the development of their academic confidence and campus engagement?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will provide a critical review of the existing literature on bridge programs and college student mentoring; it will also review the significant theories and terms that I will use in this dissertation. This chapter will conclude with the conceptual framework that will guide this dissertation research.

A Review of the Literature

Introduction

This literature review provides a summary and critical review of the themes that emerge from the research on bridge programs in higher education, with specific focus on mentoring relationships between institutional agents (faculty, administrative or staff members) and students in bridge programs. Since students who participate in bridge programs are often considered at risk of dropping out of college, this review will also examine the literature on mentoring all at-risk college students. An outline of the literature review is provided below:

- I. First, I will introduce bridge programs by describing their historical development, varied designs, and their context within contemporary higher education.
- II. Next, I will summarize the studies focused on bridge program student outcomes; this research is mostly concerned with quantifiable student outcomes in the form of GPA, credit acquisition, retention rates, etc.
- III. Then I will review the research focused on bridge program implementation. These process-based studies are concerned with data that emerges about student development during the program.
 - a. These studies are divided into those that focus on sense of belonging, the development of basic academic skills, and the importance of role models and mentors.
- IV. After reviewing research specifically from bridge programs, I will review the literature on mentoring at-risk students in general (non-bridge program students). Examining this research will allow me to broaden the context of my literature review (beyond the limited data gathered on bridge programs) and incorporate more background on successful mentorship. This will also allow me to compare the data on at-risk students within bridge programs to the data on at-risk students who have not participated in bridge programs.

- V. Finally, I will synthesize the findings of my literature review to draw conclusions relevant to my dissertation regarding the ways that the field of higher education has approached mentorship with at-risk and bridge program students.

I. Background Information and Context

The term ‘summer bridge program’ has been used for decades in higher education to describe an academic support program which helps students transition into college. Over time, bridge programs have become an important means to increase access for at-risk student populations and to support them as they face challenges persisting in college (Sablan, 2013). Summer Bridge at the University of California Berkeley was established in 1973 (Student Learning Center) while the University of Michigan’s program began in 1975 (U.Michigan). In recent years, bridge programs have grown increasingly popular as a retention initiative in both community colleges and four-year institutions (Sablan, 2013). In 2013, perhaps as a response to calls for increasing diversity and access to higher education, Yale University began Freshman Scholars, its first summer bridge program, as its founders and directors acknowledged that the Ivy League school could be a “daunting” and “complex” place for first-generation college students or for those students who may come from different educational backgrounds (Menton & Wang, 2013). Already common at community colleges and in state systems, expansion of bridge programs to Yale, an elite institution in the country, illuminates its presence and influence in a diverse set of institutions. Additionally, Yale’s Freshman Scholars program founders alluded to the need for bridge programs to help students adjust to campus life, recognizing the importance of institutions to help underrepresented students develop a sense of engagement in addition to the academic skills they need to succeed (Menton & Wang, 2013).

The current literature on bridge programs' effect on retention and student success (in the form of GPA, credit acquisition, academic skills, campus engagement) is inconclusive (Sablan, 2013). Some studies show evidence that bridge programs aid retention and student success efforts at least in some way (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Garcia, 1991; Kallison & Stader, 2012; Strayhorn, 2011; Suzuki, 2012; Walpole et al., 2008), while others show that they have little or no impact in those areas (Cabrera et al., 2012; Barnett et al., 2012). Having no impact on retention and student success poses a financial concern for institutions, based on the cost of the program and revenue lost on students who are not retained. More importantly, bridge programs with little to no impact on retention or student success are an ethical concern for the field of higher education, in that at-risk students are being offered access to college with the promise of support and instruction that will help them to succeed; when it does not work, at-risk students, often economically disadvantaged in the first place, are left with major loans and fees – and likely a sense of discouragement, if not failure – but without a college degree. If institutions want to continue to create and expand bridge programs, it is essential that researchers better understand the diverse elements of bridge programs to determine which of those various elements aid students in progressing through and thriving in college, and how those elements might be replicated in future program design.

Thus, more research is needed on the methods and strategies employed by practitioners within bridge programs and how students are influenced by those methods. One of the most common, almost universal, strategies used in bridge programs is implementing some form of advising or mentoring (Michael et al., 2010). Much of the research shows that mentoring at-risk, non-bridge college students can help them persist and succeed in college (Tovar, 2015; Schreiner et al., 2011; Engstrom, 2008), but there is limited research on mentoring bridge program students

specifically. This literature review will seek a more in-depth understanding of the literature on some of the different types of bridge programs to this point, through the lens of mentoring at-risk bridge program students and its importance as part of program design in student success.

Outcomes Based Studies

Bridge program studies can be grouped by the study's focus: those concerned with GPA and retention statistics (outcomes), and others on program design and function (process). A large portion of bridge program literature focuses on overall outcomes; this research strand is often comprised of quantitative studies that analyze retention rates and correlation between GPA, credit acquisition and/or grades in certain institutional 'gatekeeper' courses, which may indicate a student's likelihood of success in future studies. The results of these impact studies are more mixed than those studies that focus on very specifically targeted programs. For example, Santa Rita & Bacote (1997) found that students in the College Discovery Prefreshman Summer Program at Bronx Community College were retained at a rate of 93%, compared with 83% retention of all students at the institution; similarly, students in the Creating Higher Expectations of Educational Readiness (CHEER) program at a mid-sized HBCU were retained at a higher rate and had higher GPAs in their first and second years when compared to non-CHEER participant peers (Bir & Myrick, 2015). Interestingly, though, female CHEER participants were retained at a much higher rate (81%) than male students (66%), a result that needs further investigation. Though no comparison data is given, a 2012 study found that students in the FirstSTEP bridge program at Middle Tennessee University designed for underprepared STEM majors were retained at a higher rate (77.1%) than the institutional average (Raines, 2012). FirstSTEP students were also found to have a mean GPA of 2.54 after the first year, an indicator of program success; however no control group or comparison data regarding GPA was provided to indicate

whether that a 2.54 GPA is higher or lower than expectations or than the non-bridge campus average (Raines, 2012). Walpole et al. (2008) found that students who participated in a bridge program were retained at a higher rate than non-participants in a control group (96% to 90%, respectively); a positive long-term effect was found, with bridge program students' retention rate still higher by junior year (Walpole et al., 2008).

Studies on conditional admission programs have also produced mixed results in terms of overall, quantifiable outcomes like GPA, retention rate, credits acquired, etc. These bridge programs are designed to support students who have been conditionally admitted to the institution. This status, as determined by the institution, indicates that these students are academically underprepared by not having met the minimum admission standards, and thus they are 'at-risk' of not persisting at the institution. Heaney & Fisher (2011) used Astin's I-E-O model (1993) to examine the academic performance of at-risk students in a learning community at a public university; in their study, 'at-risk' was defined by conditional admission status, which meant a high school GPA of below 2.5 for resident students and below 2.75 for commuters (Heaney & Fisher, 2011). They found that neither high school GPA or ACT scores predicted first-year retention, and that students who used support services provided by the bridge program (e.g., tutoring, advising) were more likely to stay in school; students who reported they felt like their professors were concerned for their success, and students who could see a connection between their college courses and their future goals, were retained at higher rates than other conditionally admitted students who did not participate in summer bridge (Heaney & Fisher, 2011). These findings support the idea of the summer bridge as a successful structure in helping at-risk students. However, the sample of the study may be somewhat biased, since the 139 students who participated in the study had already been retained at the institution; providing data

from students who did not persist might have been useful in determining what factors were key in students' decisions to persist or leave the institution. Moreover, the study did not include a control group of students from the same institution who were not considered at-risk. This comparison could have helped to evaluate the results of data obtained from the at-risk students in the study. For example, controlling for GPA or ACT score, did participation in the bridge program contribute to first-year retention compared with the general student population who did not participate in the bridge program?

Laskey & Hetzel's (2011) study also examined a group of students in a conditional admission program. They found that there was no significant difference in the retention of at-risk students based on gender, ethnicity or the type of high school attended (Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). Similar to Heaney and Fisher's (2011) finding, the retention rates for participants in Laskey & Hetzel's study (2011) were higher for those students who attended tutoring sessions on campus than those who did not. This study highlights the impact that support programs in general (tutoring) have on first-year retention, but it does not provide any specific information on bridge programs' effect on retention. Further, no comparison data was used to examine how non-bridge program students on this particular campus are retained or participate in tutoring programs. It would be helpful to have a context in the form of average campus retention rates for traditional students when analyzing data on the relationship between retention and tutoring or bridge program participation. In addition, the method of data collection may not have been best suited for this particular data set. Laskey & Hetzel used the Five Factor Inventory for Academic Achievement (Costa & McCrae, 1992) to examine the extent to which personality traits relate to retention; certain traits (e.g., neuroticism) were associated with a higher GPA (Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). However, the data on personality traits was self-reported by students, which raises

concerns regarding the validity of the measurement since describing personality traits can be subjective. It is likely that descriptive terms like ‘open’ or ‘neurotic’ had different meanings for each student surveyed. Still, this study provides insight into the psychosocial aspects of bridge program students’ experiences which may influence their college studies.

Unlike Heaney & Fisher (2011) and Laskey & Hetzel (2011), an earlier study by Garcia (1991) included control groups in his study. He compiled data on four groups of students: (1) students who participated in only the bridge program, (2) students enrolled in the university’s freshman basic skills program, called the Intensive Learning Experience, (3) students who participated in both the bridge program and Intensive Learning Experience, and (4) students who participated in neither Intensive Learning Experience nor the bridge program. Garcia (1991) found that students who enrolled only in the bridge program were more likely to meet faculty members outside of the classroom, use campus services and develop their own study groups; bridge program students were also retained at higher rates than non-bridge students with similar academic credentials and socioeconomic backgrounds (Garcia, 1991). Bridge program students had a first-year retention rate about nine percentage points higher than students enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program who did not participate in summer bridge (Garcia, 1991). These findings indicate that bridge programs are successful at motivating at-risk students to become more engaged in the college experience, which can influence a student’s progress in pursuing a degree. While Garcia’s research (1991) is more rigorous methodologically than other studies, more recent, smaller scale studies have produced similar results, though often without the comparison groups. More recent research including comparison groups employed in Garcia’s (1991) study is needed to examine the effects of conditional bridge programs on retention and student success.

Conversely, other studies have found that bridge program participation is not positively related to student success in the form of retention or GPA. Students' participation in the New Start Summer Program (NSSP) at the University of Arizona was not found to be significantly associated with first year retention or higher GPA when compared to the general student population (Cabrera et al., 2013). Barnett et al.'s (2012) study of eight developmental bridge programs in Texas also found no relationship between program participation and increased persistence. In the short term, students were found to have higher class pass rates and GPAs than their non-participant peers, but in the long term, after several semesters, bridge program participation had no effect on GPA or persistence (Barnett et al., 2012). However, these results may be interpreted by analyzing the control group to which bridge program students are compared. In most cases, researchers have labeled the institutional average or institutional GPA mean as the standard against which to compare bridge program students' academic performance. However, by definition, bridge program students are decidedly at risk of dropping out and/or poor academic performance; students qualify and enroll in bridge programs because they identify as a disadvantaged student population which typically underperforms in the areas of retention and GPA when compared with the general population. If there is no correlation, or if GPA or retention rates are similar to the general population, that does not necessarily indicate that the program had no positive impact on student retention or GPA. It could be that the bridge program enabled underrepresented or at-risk students to achieve at rates higher than they would have without program participation. However, without comparison to a control group with similar admission criteria or at-risk status, it is not possible to determine if the impact is simply not observed when comparing bridge program students to the general population.

Many smaller studies focus on program specific outcomes. This is often the case with case studies of narrowly targeted programs, with small sample sizes. These programs can be described as narrowly targeted since they have at least two criteria for enrollment beyond high school GPA or standardized test scores (e.g. Chemistry majors from Dickinson County, Iowa). These studies generally report positive outcomes in achieving program goals, albeit on a small scale. Some bridge programs target very narrow groups of underrepresented students; the literature shows these programs to be mostly successful in improving student retention rates and GPA. For example, Ghazzawi & Jagannathan (2011) investigated the REACH Business Camp in southern California, a bridge program designed with the intent to attract and support first generation college students who were interested in a Business major and had at some point been discouraged from the prospect of attending college. Fletcher et al. (2001) examined survey results from participants in the Women in Applied Science and Engineering (WISE) Summer Bridge Program at Arizona State; Keim et al.'s (2010) study focused on a bridge program targeting Hispanic, community college students in a rural, border county in Arizona, who want to be teachers upon completion of their education, while Murphy et al. (2010) examined a bridge program for underrepresented students interested in engineering at Georgia Tech.

Overall, the results indicate that these narrowly targeted programs have a positive impact on students: Ghazzawi & Jagannathan (2011) found that 94% of student participants enrolled in college after participating in REACH Business Camp, though there was no correlation found between REACH participation and majoring in Business. Fletcher et al.'s (2001) study indicated that the WISE program was meeting program goals, with students reporting that program participation and advising helped them to adapt to college work and to the field of engineering. Examining a bridge program targeting Hispanic, community college students in a rural, border

county in Arizona who want to be teachers upon completion of their education, Keim et al. (2010)'s study found that participating in a bridge program was positively associated with college persistence among the participants, indicating that students felt their academic skills, motivation and confidence all improved as a result of program participation. A study of students enrolled in the Challenge program, a bridge program designed for underrepresented students in engineering at Georgia Tech showed that Challenge students had a higher likelihood of graduation than students who did not participate in Challenge (Murphy et al., 2010). These findings point out that small bridge programs with a narrowly focused target student population are mostly successful in meeting program goals. Perhaps this evidence suggests that a more individualized approach to academic support is important in the success of bridge programs; more research is needed examining how these narrowly focused bridge programs have been successful in accomplishing their goals in student success.

While these studies (Ghazzawi & Jagannathan, 2011; Fletcher et al., 2001; Keim et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2010) suggest bridge programs' positive impact on students, most of them were fairly small in scale. Ghazzawi & Jagannathan (2011) received 90 responses, but Keim et al. (2010) cited responses from 44 students and Fletcher et al. (2001) reported preliminary data with fewer than 20 participants. Additionally, while these studies have yielded useful information from a case study perspective, more transferable data needs to be gathered about what is driving these positive impacts. All three studies (Fletcher et al., 2001; Keim et al., 2010; and Ghazzawi & Jagannathan, 2011) seem to provide specific information about how the program is operated, and then very general information about student experiences while participating in the program. This student-based data is typically found in the anecdotal form of student comments as reported

by program faculty or the researchers themselves, or in the form of survey results gathered on students' overall satisfaction with the program.

Similarly, other outcomes-based studies have yielded supplemental data about students' experiences within the bridge program. Walpole et al.'s (2008) study found that as the semester proceeded, bridge program students' increasingly visited professors' office hours and also increased their participation in both curricular and co-curricular campus activities. Data about these activities was self-reported by the students (Walpole, 2008). This information yields a bit more insight into students' experiences in college and the impact of the bridge program itself; this data coming directly from the bridge program students shows a noticeable increase in students participating in opportunities for engagement. Thus Walpole's (2008) research points to bridge programs' positive impact on student engagement, though it does so through student satisfaction surveys. While data gathered from program-distributed student satisfaction surveys is valuable, it may not be fully reliable or comprehensive; students often rush through these surveys without paying much attention to them, or the presence of a faculty member or program director in the room as students are taking the surveys may also influence their responses. More comprehensive and objective research is needed to fully investigate how a bridge program may impact student engagement.

Further, although Walpole's (2008) study indicates a positive impact on student engagement, it also leaves out any information about how the program facilitates such engagement beyond merely existing and enrolling students. Much of the existing research on student engagement emphasizes the purposeful role that an institution must play in the form of active outreach; this active outreach is required in order for engagement to occur and for the student to gain meaningful collegiate experiences. Similarly to Walpole (2008), many general

impact studies seem to leave out much specificity of the program's design and implementation; we know little about the program's active outreach to students, or other methodologies implemented within the program. This lack of focus neglects the process of engagement within a bridge program.

Clearly, outcomes studies are important; it is essential to understand the general impact of bridge programs on student retention and GPA in order to determine bridge programs' future and best use in higher education. However, given the mixed results in outcomes studies and a wide variety of program structures, which makes it difficult to generalize outcomes based results, it would be useful to take on a more in-depth approach to studying bridge program implementation. With this focus, researchers can learn more about what components of the program may or may not influence student development and student engagement with the institution, and how it does so.

Program Design and Function (Implementation/Process) Studies

Sense of Belonging

Beyond the GPA/retention impact studies, three themes emerge from the literature analyzing bridge program design and function: (1) the importance of role models and mentors, (2) the development of basic academic skills, and (3) the development of students' sense of belonging at the institution. A 2010 article included these three elements among the most important components of the DeSales University's Act 101 program, a bridge program which serves to help underprepared students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to develop the skills necessary to succeed in college. Act 101 has used evidence-based practice over 20 years to improve policies and program design (Michael et al., 2010). Peer mentors, faculty and program staff are an important component of the program's success; additionally, students in the DeSales

Act 101 program are required to attend seminars on academic skill-building, including note-taking, textbook reading, preparing for exams, the college writing process, giving presentations, etc. (Michael et al., 2010). The authors also note that the student must feel a sense of belonging through support of the program in order for the program to reach its student success goals (Michael et al., 2010). Although the authors do not include specifics about research that accompanies these best practices, it does state that all recommendations are evidence-based, comprised from years of research and experience working with students in a bridge program (Michael et al., 2010).

Several studies affirm that bridge programs can be useful in creating a sense of belonging in students. The term “sense of belonging” refers to a student’s feeling of “affiliation and identification with the university community” (Hoffman et al., 2002, p. 228). As a concept, sense of belonging was first used in analysis of college student departure. Developing sense of belonging has to do with a student’s “fit” with the campus, or how much the student feels the campus’ values fall in line with his or her own values, as well as how valued the student’s own presence and involvement on campus is (Hoffman et al., 2002). Hoffman et al. (2002) describe sense of belonging from a broader, psychological standpoint, as the opposite of loneliness. In models of student departure, having a sense of belonging decreases the likelihood that a student will drop out of college. Thus, sense of belonging is an important concept in analyzing the outcomes related to bridge program participation; since bridge programs serve students who are at risk of dropping out of college, developing a sense of belonging has been a focus of the research that examined bridge programs. Students developing a sense of belonging as a result of participation in bridge programs is seen as a success of the program.

Strayhorn's (2011) study employed the Perna & Thomas model to determine if participating in a summer bridge program affected a student's sense of belonging; a pre and post program survey as well as interviews determined that students did feel a sense of belonging or community at the end of the program (Strayhorn, 2011). A study of the Pathways Summer Bridge Program (PSBP) yielded similar results, with students reporting that participating in PSBP made them feel like they belonged (Suzuki, 2012). Though the authors did not use the term sense of belonging in describing their findings, Walpole et al.'s (2008) study also implies that students developed a sense of belonging through the bridge program, since they self-reported increased campus engagement in the form of visiting faculty office hours and participating in both social and academic activities. This finding is significant since at-risk students may often feel marginalized or isolated on a college campus, approaching academic work for which they are underprepared, or social activities with a student population in which they might be a minority. Consistent interactions with institutional agents through the program seems to be key in creating a sense of belonging in bridge program students (Michael et al., 2010).

Developing Basic Academic Skills

A bridge program must do more than develop a student's sense of belonging in order to be successful in fostering students' academic success. One way that bridge programs create a consistent interaction between students and bridge program staff is the implementation of academic skill workshops, seminars and tutorials. This allows programs to focus not just on a sense of belonging, but also the pragmatic skills and strategies that students need in order to be successful in college. A 2009 study of a program at Columbia College, Chicago showed that only when administrators shifted the program beyond establishing a sense of connection to the community, and integrated a more rigorous curriculum to help students develop academic skills,

did they see improvements in student outcomes (McCurrie, 2009). However, like many other studies, McCurrie (2009) did not measure the growth of academic skills, but focused on the general impact of the program in terms of retention and student evaluations. Other studies (Ghazzawi & Jagannathan, 2011; Murphy, 2010) also note the importance of academic skill building in the design of the program, while the research conducted on the program focuses elsewhere. While academic skills are emphasized as an important component of the bridge program, standing on their own, or as a means to keep a consistent connection between students and institutional agents, the delivery of those skills or the development of them is not often examined in the literature.

That said, developing academic skills to prepare students for the rigors of college level work is a priority of most bridge programs. While some programs use credit-bearing courses to help students adjust to collegiate coursework, others offer students low or no-stakes basic skills workshops as preparation for their subsequent courses. The credit-bearing design seems to foster greater success in the long term (McGlynn, 2012; Barnett, 2012). For example, research shows that students who participated in course-based summer bridge programs were more likely to pass writing and math courses in the fall semester, and more likely to take higher level courses in the first year than students who participated in “freestanding programs,” those with non-credit bearing basic skills workshops or seminars (McGlynn, 2012).

Limited research confirms that bridge programs foster the development of academic skills, whether or not the program itself gives students a forum (e.g. a credit-bearing class) in which to apply them. A study of 782 high school student participants from summer bridge programs at seven community colleges and seven public universities used a pre and post program test to determine students’ level of college readiness (Kallison & Stader, 2012). Students saw

success in the growth of their reading skills (Kallison & Stader, 2012); similar results were found in Strayhorn's (2011) study; students reported the growth of their social and academic skills. While it is difficult to evaluate the development of self-reported academic skills, this evidence makes it clear that participating in a bridge program can at least inspire confidence in at-risk students. Since it is the tutors, faculty members, administrations and program staff who instruct students on those skills, it is important to examine how those institutional agents relate to students, how they can be instrumental in increasing confidence and building meaningful relationships that develop out of their work together.

Importance of Role Models and Mentors

The existing research validates the value of bridge programs' focus on helping students to develop mentoring relationships with upper class peers, program staff and faculty members. For example, the DeSales Act 101 program fosters mentorship throughout the summer, but also requires weekly, one-on-one meetings with program staff throughout the first semester; meetings continue semi-annually for these students through graduation (Michael et al., 2010).

Additionally, students in the Challenge program were assigned upper class campus leaders who served as academic coaches; students met with these coaches not just throughout the bridge program term, but also throughout the entire first year (Murphy et al., 2010). By doing so, program design fostered continued, consistent contact throughout the student experience.

When students are asked about what they gained from participating in a bridge program, they often respond with statements about the value of these relationships (Kallison & Stader 2012; McGlynn, 2012). Contreras (2011) notes that after a study of 40 different bridge programs aimed at helping at-risk students gain access to college, it was clear that having students see themselves in the program's role models – peer mentors, faculty, staff – was crucial to students'

success. Bridge programs enable students to identify with their mentors and envision themselves achieving the same kinds of goals such as graduating from college, earning a certain GPA, having a command of a content area (Contreras, 2011). The advantages of mentorship were also noted in Keim et al.'s (2010) study on a small bridge program for Hispanic students in rural Arizona. The program includes a series of workshops featuring Hispanic speakers helping students to work on academic skills; the workshops focused on allowing students to see the value in their own experiences and how they might relate to those of the speaker (Keim et al., 2010). In follow-up surveys, students reported feeling more confident and connected to their own skillset as a result of engaging with the mentors/speakers who participated in the program (Keim et al., 2010). The researchers note that mentoring relationships were most effective when mentors were able to focus on connections between the students and the mentors, and when mentors stressed the ways that students' unique experiences were valuable and contributed to their potential success as future teachers (Keim et al., 2010).

Keim et al.'s (2010) study contributes to explaining how mentors were helpful to students. More often, mentorship is mentioned almost off-hand in bridge program literature, a side note gathered from student data after accumulating the retention data. While bridge program literature emphasizes the importance of mentoring students as a component of the program, there needs to be more research on how mentorship is structured and conducted within bridge programs. While mentorship data specific to bridge programs is limited, the literature regarding advising and mentoring relationships between non-bridge students and institutional faculty and administration offers some important insight into how those bonds are forged.

Mentoring At-Risk Students

Bridge programs were originally designed to aid the college transition of “at-risk” students, in hopes of improving their chances at persistence and graduation. In some respects, “at-risk” has become a catchall term to describe any student with an attribute which has at some time been connected to a lack of college persistence. Depending on the bridge program and the institution, at-risk might be defined in a number of different ways. For the purposes of this dissertation, at-risk refers to students who are considered ethnic and racial minorities, first-generation college students, low-income students and academically underprepared students. It should be noted that while almost all bridge program students are considered at-risk in some way, not all at-risk students participate in bridge programs. In fact, many do not. Thus, in order to understand at-risk, bridge program students on a more comprehensive level, it is important to review the studies examining at-risk students who are not bridge program students. The ways in which these students are mentored and advised have appeared in the literature more frequently than studies on mentoring bridge program students specifically.

To understand how mentorship factors into student success, it is important to understand how advising and mentorship are described in general beyond bridge program literature. Anderson & Shannon (1988) discuss the importance of “five mentoring functions: teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, and befriending” (p. 40). In the interpretation of mentorship, acting as a role model is key, as is developing an on-going relationship between mentor and mentee (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). While the five functions of mentoring design was developed in reference to K-12 teachers mentoring each other, the concept is transferable to higher education. Just as Anderson & Shannon’s description of mentorship goes beyond the required duties, so must academic advisers and institutional agents of college students (Drake, 2011). Effective advisers must go beyond career or registration advice to help students develop

problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Drake, 2011); with this description, Drake (2011) is referencing mentoring as this dissertation has defined it. Also important to the mentoring process is keeping students connected to the institution through academic support services and programming; only then can advising/mentoring relationships have a positive influence on students' success in college (Drake, 2011). The same concept can be applied to at-risk students, who need to develop a sense of confidence and belonging – in addition to academic skills – in order to fully engage with the campus academic community.

Research has shown that providing mentorship to at-risk students helps them to succeed academically, at least in the form of retention and GPA. A 2015 study of Latino/a students at community college found that students' interactions with “institutional agents” (p. 62) positively influenced their intentions to persist and succeed in college (Tovar, 2015). Beyond just staying in college, interaction with members of the institutional community helps students to succeed, with higher GPAs also correlated with increased faculty interaction (Tovar, 2015). In a different mentoring model, college students were provided academic coaches from a vendor outside the institution, a company called Inside Track (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). Data was gathered from 13,555 students at 8 different institutions to determine the effectiveness of Inside Track's academic coaches. Most structured advising or mentoring programs offer students support from an individual within the institution; however, results from this study (Bettinger & Baker, 2011) indicate that outside mentors can also be effective: students who used Inside Track coaches had higher graduation rates than students who were not provided with academic coaches (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). Although the Inside Track coaches were not necessarily affiliated with the institution which the student attended, there was consistent, regular contact between students and coaches via social media, text messages and phone calls (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). While it is

difficult to gauge the ways that this form of mentorship might have influenced a student's engagement with the institutional community (since the coaches may not have been affiliated with the institution in any way), it does confirm the benefits of students' regular contact with a mentor who helps the student develop ways to overcome academic challenges, utilize resources and maintain motivation to stay in college.

It is important to not only to explore the effects of mentoring on student success, but also to investigate what mentoring strategies result in positive student outcomes. A 2011 study surveyed 62 successful, high-risk students (successful was defined as having earned a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher, and high-risk was defined by admission test scores, conditional admission status, or placement in remedial courses) found that the most effective behaviors for mentors to exhibit were those that motivated students; it was important to students that their mentors were taking time for students, related to students on their own level, and generally pushed students to excel (Schreiner et al., 2011). Also important to the mentorship process was regular contact, with students reporting that the faculty and staff members that they met with consistently were those who had the greatest influence (Schreiner et al., 2011). Research also shows that college students' expectations for their mentors can be grouped into four areas: guiding, informing, apprising, and mentoring, listed in order of importance (Propp & Rhodes, 2006). Students' expectations for their mentors did not vary based on demographic characteristics, but the authors recognized that the sample (93 student participants at a large Midwestern university) was fairly homogeneous (Propp & Rhodes, 2006). Additionally, while this study provided information on students' expectations for mentorship, it did not delve into the effects of mentorship according to this prioritized list of focus. More research is needed to determine whether fulfilling students' expectations for mentorship will help them to achieve their academic goals.

Some of the literature examines the mentorship relationship from the role of the faculty or staff member. Bensimon (2007) urges higher education researchers to stop focusing on the credentials and attributes of at-risk students in order to help them succeed, but instead to give more attention to the practitioner side of the mentorship relationship. While confirming that continued relationships with practitioners help students to persist and succeed in college, more information about the strategies and mindsets that practitioners bring into the mentorship role is needed (Bensimon, 2007). Especially for at-risk students, researchers need to better understand the “funds of knowledge,” (Bensimon, 2007, p. 446) the information and resources that practitioners use in advising; practitioners must focus on a mentality of “equity-mindedness,” through which they are able to individualize the advising process for each student, offering what might help students to be successful and acknowledging that at-risk students may need more attention or different strategies employed (Bensimon, 2007). As a theoretical construct, “equity-mindedness” (Bensimon, 2007) helps to inform research on advising technique and provides an important emphasis on the practitioner’s role in student success. Important to applying equity-mindedness in practice are the concepts of “single-loop learning,” “double-loop learning,” and “culture of inquiry” (Witham & Bensimon, 2012). “Single-loop learning” is used to describe a practitioner’s approach to a problem without trying to understand to address the values or underlying issues that created the problem; it is focused on “problem-solving and not problem-questioning,” and addresses issues at the surface level (Witham & Bensimon, 2012, p. 48). “Double-loop learning,” on the other hand, goes beyond the surface level problem to understand what is driving the issue and how those underlying problems may be addressed, even when they are not as visible as the initial problem (Witham & Bensimon, 2012). A “culture of inquiry” is one which promotes “double-loop learning,” by involving multiple stakeholders in a thorough

investigation of issues when they arise, examining the institutional and practitioner roles when generating solutions to problems, and fostering a reflective and questioning atmosphere when responding to issues (Witham & Bensimon, 2012). “Double-loop learning” and a “culture of inquiry” provide the conditions necessary for practitioners to operate with equity-mindedness, because it encourages them to think about those issues below the surface that often influence disadvantaged students’ ability to succeed, but are often invisible or overlooked as part of the academic issues which have manifested as a result. According to Witham & Bensimon (2012), “single-loop learning” discourages equity-mindedness, since it allows practitioners to address only surface level issues and not provide a holistic, thoughtful response to the causes of the issues which accounts for practitioner and institutional responsibility.

While Bensimon’s (2007) article presents a theory without specific research on its outcomes, other studies have examined the effects of various mentoring strategies with at-risk students. A 2008 study of students in a learning community outlined the ways that at-risk students interpreted faculty-specific approaches to mentoring (Engstrom, 2008). Students reported that they learned best when faculty members used active learning pedagogies to create a ‘safe space’ for learning and participating, building trust and fellowship among the students in the learning community (Engstrom, 2008). Additionally, like other studies have shown (Schreiner et al., 2011), students felt that validation from their mentors, in the form of inspiring academic confidence and value for students’ experiences, was especially influential in students’ success (Engstrom, 2008). Clearly, an informed approach is necessary for mentors who work with at-risk students to really make a difference in their pursuit of higher education. However, the focus of much literature on the at-risk student population, as Bensimon (2007) pointed out, has been dominated by quantitative impact studies of retention and GPA, and not nearly enough

on the strategies and methods employed by successful mentors. Even more so, the research on mentoring relationships within bridge programs is lacking; more information is needed to discover the ways in which students who embark on the bridge program experience may be aided by forming bonds with institutional agents who are trying to foster their success in college.

Conclusion

With increasing numbers of students entering bridge programs each year, as both domestic and international institutions develop new programs (Kezar, 2000), now is the time to link accountability with access in the domain of bridge programs. If bridge programs are to be successful in broadening access to higher education for at-risk students, it is essential to examine not just if, but how and why programs are and are not helpful to students, as well as the ways in which practitioners aid or do not aid in moving students forward in their pursuit of a college education. While determining the impact of bridge programs on retention and student success is important, it is time to take bridge program research to the next level, to focus on the process of implementing bridge programs and the student-practitioner relationship. The structures and designs of bridge programs are so varied, that it is only in examining the elemental aspects of program implementation that we can truly understand bridge programs, and how they may or may not play a pivotal role in higher education's future.

Crucial to any bridge program are the people who operate it: the faculty, staff, administration and peer support team who are there to help at-risk students move forward in developing the necessary skills and relationships necessary for college success. Bensimon (2007) was right in calling for research to focus less on student attributes, and more on the approaches and strategies implemented by practitioners. We must know more about the way that students and institutional agents relate to one another in bridge programs: How are the bonds of

mentorship formed in the short time period that bridge programs run? In what ways do those relationships persist (if at all) after the program ends? How do the practitioners' own attributes and experiences influence the mentoring relationship? Are students more comfortable seeking mentorship from a faculty member or an administrator? Does the type of mentoring vary based on the mentor's position at the institution and the student's perception of it? Do successful mentors approach all students in the same manner? These questions need to be addressed in further research in order to better understand and maximize bridge programs' impact on student success.

Review of Theories and Relevant Terms

The relevant theories guiding this study are concerned with the process of student development and achievement. Since my study focuses on the ways in which mentoring relationships may or may not influence bridge program students' development of academic confidence and sense of engagement, I will begin with theories and terms that address how students achieve success in college course work.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is a term that is often used without clear definition, frequently used interchangeably with student involvement or even integration into college environments (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). However, though it is somewhat related to involvement, student engagement is clearly delineated from other measures. Involvement can simply mean students attending club meetings or campus events. Astin (1984) defines involvement as both "physiological and psychological energy" spent by the student on his or her college education, so this definition would include studying or thinking about classes as well. However, engagement demands more investment from both the student and the institution (Harper & Quaye, 2009). As

Kuh (2001) describes it, student engagement consists of both student participation and institution contribution via resources and environment. Student engagement can be defined as both student and institution coming together in order to develop a relationship which fosters intellectual growth, student development, and student success (Kuh, 2001). For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use Harper & Quaye's (2009) definition of student engagement: "participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes" (p. 2). These measurable outcomes include academic confidence and academic achievement.

Engagement is referenced and perhaps measured most frequently via the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE bases its measurement of student engagement on four themes of engagement indicators: (1) Academic challenge, (2) Learning with peers, (3) Experiences with faculty, and (4) Campus environment (NSSE Engagement Indicators, 2018). Studies have shown that feeling engaged allows students to feel included in the campus environment, as well as more comfortable seeking help and advice from faculty members (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Engagement requires the institution to be an active participant in activities and environments that contribute to student success; when students participate in "educationally purposeful activities," student learning and the "overall educational experience" improves (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Harper and Quaye (2009) note that institutions with strong levels of student engagement are aware of their need to engage students in a variety of types of curricular and co-curricular activities in order to foster student success, and that students will not or in some cases, cannot engage themselves due to outside circumstances like the necessity to work or provide care for family members. This is especially true for students who are considered at-risk (Harper & Quaye, 2009). First-generation students, for example, may not know how to navigate the world

of co-curricular activities on a college campus without some guidance from the institution (Harper & Quaye, 2009). However, with that guidance and outreach from the institution, the student becomes more able to step forward and meet the institution, generating student engagement which can drive academic success.

The concept of student engagement is useful in examining bridge programs in that program practitioners must not assume that their students will be able to navigate the route to collegiate success without some institutional and structured guidance that facilitate engagement and learning. Students must be willing to follow that guidance and accept that outreach, but in many cases of at-risk students, it is imperative that the institution's outreach and guidance is visible and accessible. Perhaps one of the keys to a successful bridge program lies in the program's concerted effort to provide opportunities for students to engage in educationally purposeful activities and learning. If bridge programs purport to help students adjust to campus culture and collegiate-level academic work, bridge programs must promote engagement by providing strategic, intentional opportunities for their students to engage with the institution.

Academic Confidence / Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy and academic confidence are similar and related concepts; while self-efficacy theory explains motivation for improving performance in any arena, the concept of academic confidence is more narrowly applied to the college setting for students trying to improve their academic performance (Sander & Sanders, 2006). Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy talks about something called mastery experience, which most significantly contributes to a person's feeling of self-assurance when trying to complete a certain task. Mastery experience has to do with the way a person interprets outcomes; if an action is viewed as having a successful outcome, the level of self-efficacy rises, while if an action is viewed as having an unsuccessful

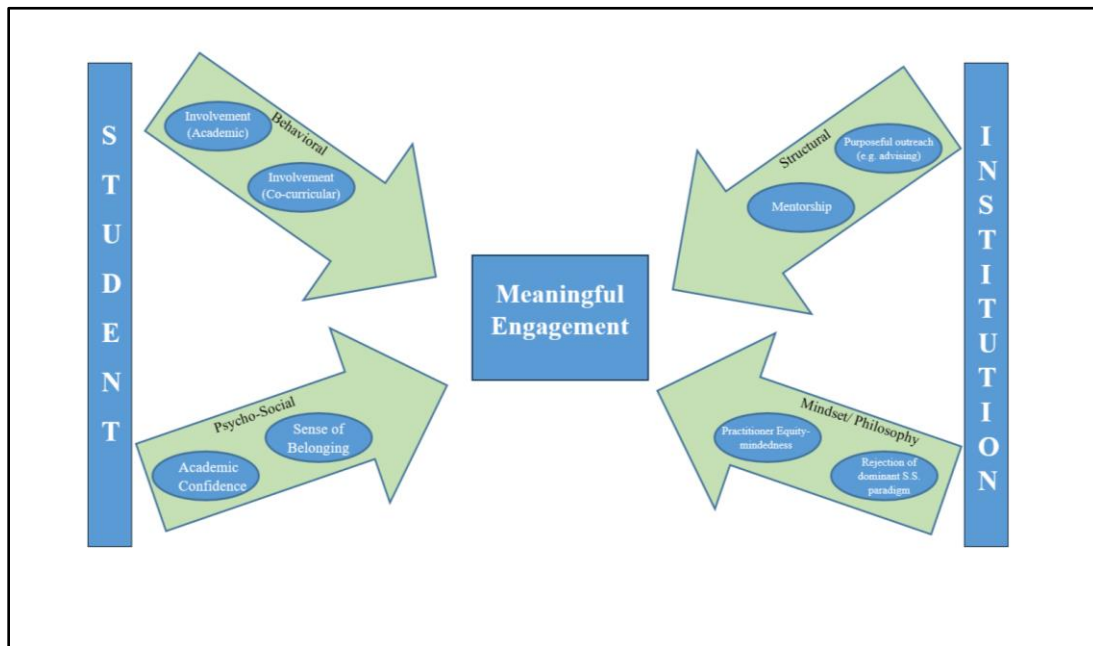
outcome, self-efficacy drops (Sander & Sanders, 2006). Self-efficacy theory posits that feeling both able and prepared to accomplish a task will improve the actual performance of that task (Chemers et al., 2001). From a student point of view, if a student believes he or she is able and prepared to perform well on a test, he or she will be more likely to do so; and consequently, doing so will raise his or her level of self-efficacy, making him or her more likely to do well on his or her next test, and so on. Various studies have shown that self-efficacy affected academic performance both in the form of achievement measured by GPA and academic goals (Pajares, 1996; Paris & Oka, 1986; Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Further, high levels of self-efficacy have been associated with student learning, time management and management of work ethic, all of which are crucial to success at the college level (Chemers et al., 2001).

Sander & Sanders (2006) argue that self-efficacy theory – when combined with expectancy-value theory – is crucial to understanding the way that students gain self-confidence in an academic setting. Academic confidence is the specific self-efficacy that a student feels regarding his or her academic work (Sander & Sanders, 2006). For this study, academic confidence will be used as a term defined by the level of assurance or belief a student has in him or herself to achieve in a particular academic setting. Just as in the case of self-efficacy, academic confidence is key to student success. In order to engage with the institution in various activities and environments which can foster student development and success, students must feel able and prepared to participate (Sander & Sanders, 2006). If a student feels his or her writing skills are inferior to those of his or her classmates, for example, he or she may not participate in peer tutoring sessions or class discussions with a high level of engagement.

A study by Alfassi (2003) showed the importance of academic confidence to the success of a group of at-risk college students. While existing research points to the value of self-efficacy

and academic confidence, it is also important to consider, as Sander & Sanders (2006) point out, what external, environmental factors may influence the “development and maintenance” (p. 31) of academic confidence in students. Thus, my study explores how one of those external factors – program mentors – may influence academic confidence and engagement of students in a bridge program.

Conceptual Framework



In this dissertation, I sought to gain a better understanding of the process of mentorship within a bridge program. Since mentorship does not exist in a vacuum, it is crucial to understand the associated processes and concepts that accompany the formation and maintenance of mentoring relationships. In the above concept map, I attempted to include the most essential ideas that contributed to my examination of bridge program mentorship.

The goal of this dissertation was to understand how practitioners may or may not provide mentorship and facilitate student engagement for bridge program students. Bridge program

structures attempt to foster mentoring relationships in ways that vary considerably; this means that institutional mentorship may – and often does – look different from one bridge program to the next. Perhaps at one institution bridge program students are required to have a weekly meeting with an advisor, while at another, students are assigned a peer mentor who lives on the same floor in the residence hall, while at another, the bridge program hosts (or perhaps requires) enrichment opportunities for students to interact with their instructors outside the classroom on a regular basis. However, whatever the varying structures that exist within bridge programs to encourage mentorship, there are certain elements that should be present in order for the mentoring relationship to foster student engagement. The conceptual model above provides a framework through which I have explored how institutional mentorship may lead to student engagement and – eventually – success, for at-risk students.

Since engagement requires both the institution and the student coming together, it was essential that my research explore both sides of engagement, and how each side is related to the other. The model includes both mindsets and actions, as both are important to the student and the institution in enhancing meaningful engagement. From the institution's side, it is important that its practitioners first critically assess what Bensimon (2007) calls the dominant paradigm of student success. That is, practitioners must not accept the idea that students are the sole authors of their own success; practitioners must be cognizant that at-risk students face more challenges in their route to success that may prevent them from participating in any activity or adopting any mindset to facilitate their own engagement (Bensimon, 2007). In addition to various barriers to involvement outside the classroom (e.g. the necessity to care for family members or to maintain employment outside of campus), at-risk students may often find themselves intimidated by navigating campus support systems and thus they feel unsure of how to ask for help, or perhaps

prohibited by a fear of failure more so than students who are not at-risk (Bensimon, 2007).

Practitioners are called upon to realize that at-risk students need outreach from the institution in order to successfully engage. Once that outreach occurs, at-risk students are empowered to be proactive participants in their own success. Further, practitioners must take on some form of equity-mindedness, described by Bensimon (2007) as a characteristic which connects unequal student outcomes to “institution-based dysfunctions” and not student attributes (p. 446). Equity-minded practitioners “reflect on their own and their colleagues’ role in and responsibility for student success” (Bensimon, 2007, p. 446); within this mentality, students’ success or failure is dependent on the efforts of the institution and its practitioners to create opportunities for engagement that students can then seize.

In adopting this mentality, engagement-fostering behaviors from the institution include structured outreach to at-risk students, individualized to their particular needs and experiences on campus. In the case of bridge programs, these behaviors come in many different forms, but can include required advisement sessions, co-curricular experiences offered exclusively to bridge program students, peer mentorship offered in a residential learning community, required tutoring sessions, and many others. When institutional behaviors accomplish successful outreach to bridge program students, students begin to have regular contact with practitioners on campus. When the institutional outreach is successful, it allows for mentoring relationships to be formed between students and institutional agents; program structure may encourage these relationships to develop more to one agent (e.g. faculty) than another (e.g. advisor or peer mentor), but nonetheless mentoring relationships for bridge program (or any at-risk) student must begin with structured outreach from the institution.

The student side of the model reflects a student's response to effective institutional outreach. Institutional outreach must be made in such a way that students respond and get involved on some level. Sometimes this means simply adhering to the requirements of the bridge program, and attending the required advising sessions; other times this may mean a student taking advantage of a faculty member's decision to remain after class to answer questions. From a co-curricular angle, perhaps the student gets involved by joining a club, or even more simply, forging an acquaintanceship with a peer mentor or a fellow bridge program student. As institutional outreach proceeds and involvement grows, students gradually begin to develop a sense of belonging and academic confidence which are necessary for students to engage on a deeper level. For example, imagine a student on a bridge program field trip to an art museum who has even a very brief interaction with the accompanying faculty member. That brief conversation can increase the student's comfort level in the faculty member's classroom, encouraging the student's participation, more active thinking, time spent in office hours, and other indicators of meaningful engagement.

While there is no linear path to mentorship or to meaningful engagement that can account for every at-risk student's development, the literature on at-risk student populations and engagement provides some conceptual lens for understanding these processes. In the concept model above, I adopted concepts regarding at-risk student and applied theories of student engagement to provide a conceptual and analytic framework for my own research. Breaking down the process into student and institution, and then into behaviors and mentalities has helped me to learn more about how both students and practitioners approach mentoring relationships, as well as what those behaviors and mentalities look like as mentoring relationships develop.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine what programmatic elements or practitioner strategies contribute to a ‘meaningful’ mentoring relationship between a bridge program student and an institutional agent. For this dissertation, a ‘meaningful’ mentoring relationship is defined as one that contributes to a student’s engagement and development of academic confidence, propelling the student toward academic success in the form of college persistence, completion, and academic achievement. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) gathers data on student engagement by assessing engagement indicators organized into four themes: (1) Academic Challenge, (2) Learning with Peers, (3) Experiences with Faculty, and (4) Campus Environment (NSSE Engagement Indicators, 2018). Though I did not use a survey to collect data, as the NSSE does, the Student Interview Protocol (Appendix B) has been constructed using these four themes as a guide. For example, since Experiences with Faculty is one indicator of engagement, I asked students about the ways that they interact with their professors. Similarly, the Student Interview Protocol (Appendix B) uses as a guide the six factors of academic confidence (Studying, Understanding, Verbalizing, Clarifying, Attendance, Grades) of Sander & Sanders’s (2006) academic confidence scale. This scale asks students how confident they feel about their own abilities to ask for help when needed, to produce adequate writing for their required assignments, comprehend and follow course discussions, etc. Similarly, the Student Interview Protocol (Appendix B) asked students to provide a self-assessment of their confidence in certain academic areas. From the practitioner/institutional side, I looked for evidence of equity-mindedness and behaviors that foster engagement and the development of academic confidence. This chapter will outline the defining perspectives of the study, as well as describe

the research design, data collection, data analysis, study limitations, and dependability and comprehensiveness.

Defining Perspectives of the Study

The research conducted for this dissertation is qualitative in nature, meaning that the research was conducted with the idea of collecting data in its natural setting, with the intention of “investigat[ing] topics in all their complexity” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011, p. 2). Qualitative research is designed to allow researchers into the world they plan to explore, to gather data in great detail from small samples of participants within the environments being investigated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). While quantitative data, which, as Bensimon (2007) points out, focuses on the majority and allows for little learning about “students on the margins,” (p. 449), a qualitative approach was appropriate for this study of at-risk students since it allows for a more focused, in-depth look at students’ and practitioners’ experiences. In this dissertation, it was my intention to gather this kind of rich data on bridge program mentorship by engaging in document analysis and semi-structured interviews with both students and practitioners. This qualitative study utilized the strategies of a case study, which focuses on one program in depth over a specific period of time (Yin, 2013). Case studies are valuable in allowing researchers to understand the uniqueness of what they are studying and how the thing being studied works and does not work; a case study allows the researcher to view that uniqueness through a focused and detailed study of the case (Stake, 2010).

Another advantage of the case study is that it allows the researcher to focus on a “contemporary phenomenon,” within its own real world context (Yin, 2013). For this dissertation, the phenomenon being studied was the formation and development of mentoring relationships between bridge program students and institutional agents. A qualitative case study

can uncover connections between operations over time, and not just how frequently an operation happens (Yin, 2013). Since my research questions involve the way that a connection develops between students and mentors in the context of a bridge program, a case study was helpful in better understanding how those connections are formed and how or why they may influence students' experiences. Case studies are also appropriate when the researcher has "little or no control over behavioral events," and the study is "contemporary," and not a historical assessment of events that happened in the past (Yin, 2013). In this study, I as the researcher observed the behavioral events of students and mentors, recorded trends and patterns in those events, without having any influence over them. Because the purpose of my dissertation is to seek to understand and improve mentoring relationships and the ways that practitioners help (or do not help) students' engagement and academic confidence, a qualitative approach of this nature was best suited for uncovering the level of detail needed to achieve this purpose.

This dissertation makes use of an interpretive perspective. As Bogdan & Biklen (2011) explain, an interpretive perspective assumes that "human experience is mediated by interpretation" (p. 27). In other words, people are constantly making their own meanings of events, things and actions which may not correspond to a dictionary or encyclopedia entry, or even to another person's meaning. As a researcher utilizing an interpretive perspective, I gathered data on the participants' experiences as the participants of my study have co-constructed and interpreted them, and as they have made sense of their own experiences. I did not interpret their statements myself, but attempted to co-construct their experiences as they have interpreted them, as they reported them to me. Then, I analyzed the data which was gathered on the participants' interpretations in order to form responses to the dissertation's research questions.

Research Questions

This dissertation intended to answer the following research questions:

1. How does a summer bridge program foster mentoring relationships between students and institutional agents?
 - a. What policies, practices, and/or structures are in place to foster mentoring relationships?
 - b. In what ways do a program's components or conditions facilitate student-mentor interactions?
2. How do mentoring relationships developed in the context of a bridge program influence program participants' academic confidence and campus engagement during college?
 - a. What approaches and methods are employed by mentors in working with bridge program students?
 - b. How do mentors describe their influence on students' development of academic confidence and campus engagement?
 - c. How do students describe their experience working with mentors and their mentoring relationships?
 - d. How do students describe the role of mentors in the development of their academic confidence and campus engagement?

Research Design

Site Selection

The research for this dissertation was conducted at a mid-size (approximately 6000 undergraduate students), private University in the Northeast. The University has a 45% diversity rate (which means that 55% of the student population identify as White/Caucasian) and offers students more than 90 undergraduate majors; the average combined new SAT score (2-part) for incoming students in Fall 2017 was 1220 (average ACT composite score = 25) (Institution website; fast facts page). I chose this University for two key reasons: first, this institution runs

four different bridge programs, targeting different groups of incoming students. This is somewhat atypical for an institution like the host institution for this dissertation. An analysis of the institution's three peer schools (those schools identified by itself and by the other schools as peers, according to The Chronicle of Higher Education's Peer Network; see Table 2 below) shows that running three bridge programs on a single campus is a unique feature. Of the three peer schools, Peer School 1 has a single bridge program which spans over a one-week period just before Fall semester classes begin for incoming first-year students. Peer School 2 offers several experiences or transitional support systems that seem similar to bridge programs in that they target underrepresented students and offer academic assistance. However, all but one of these programs or systems work with high school students who are not on track to be admitted or enrolled at Peer School 2; since my research is concerned with institutional mentorship, it is important to focus on programs which work with college students at their current or intended institution. The one transitional support system that does work with current college students at Peer School 2 is an academic resource center and not a program, and thus cannot be labeled a bridge program. Peer School 3 does not appear to have a bridge program in any form.

Table 2: Host and Peer Institutions' Characteristics

| Institution | Host Institution | Peer School 1 | Peer School 2 | Peer School 3 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Location | Northeast | Northeast | Southern California | Northern California |
| Size (undergraduates) | ~6000 | ~ 16,000 | ~8500 | ~6700 |
| Type | Private / Catholic | Private / Catholic | Private / Catholic | Private / Catholic |
| Diversity Rate | 45% | 57% | 36% | 70.7% |
| Admission Rate | 79% | 43% | 51% | 68% |
| Student to Faculty Ratio | 14:1 | 17:1 | 15:1 | 14:1 |
| 6-yr Graduation Rate | 66% | 57% | 73% | 70% |

Sources: <http://www.chronicle.com/interactives/peers-network>; Institution websites, fast facts pages; U.S. News and World Report Higher Education Report

Thus the opportunity to research a bridge program at an institution which runs bridge programs in four different forms offers a unique perspective. While my research focused on one program, the institution's focus on supporting students in transition suggests that it has made concerted efforts to support potentially at-risk, incoming student populations. I have provided a table below outlining the different bridge programs at the host institution. Each program at the host institution is run by a different set of institutional agents, though Programs B and C are closely linked. Program A is a state-funded program dating back to the 1960s, designed to serve low-income and underrepresented racial/ethnic minority students. It runs academic sessions during the summer term before students' first year of college; students live on campus during these sessions and participate in structured tutoring, study and advisement schedules. Each student is assigned a 'Student Development Specialist,' with whom the student meets to discuss course progress, registration, and career goals both throughout the summer and for the rest of the student's career at the institution. When students enter Program A, they are connected to upper class Program A students during the summer sessions to learn more about their peers' experiences.

Program B grants conditional admission to students who have fallen below the institution's high school GPA or standardized test score general admission requirements. Program B students enroll in a reduced course load in the fall semester and must achieve a 2.5 cumulative GPA while successfully earning seven credits during the term in order to be admitted to the institution. Program B students must attend mandatory tutoring and study hall sessions; they are each assigned a professional academic advisor as well as a peer advisor with whom they meet regularly. When students achieve the required GPA and credit count in Program B, they are then admitted to Program C. Once in Program C, students enroll in a full-time schedule and

maintain their contacts with institutional agents such as academic advisors and peer advisors, though in a less structured way than in Program B. Within Program C, there are also students who were never affiliated with Program B, as their admission credentials allowed them direct admission into the institution. Program C students remain in Program C until they declare a major. Program D students participate in a summer session and required events, and maintain advising support from the program throughout their college careers.

Table 3: Bridge Programs at Host Institution

| | <u>Program A</u> | <u>Program B</u> | <u>Program C</u> | <u>Program D</u> |
|------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Targeted Student Group | Low-income and underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities | Conditionally admitted students with sub-standard high school GPA or standardized test scores | Students who have completed Program B | Low-income and underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities interested in medical or dental school |
| Program Requirements | Attend all summer sessions and required events; remain in academic good standing by institution standards | Attend all required sessions and events; reduced course load; must achieve 2.5 cumulative GPA and earn 7 credits in first term | Maintain good academic standing by institution standards; attend all required sessions and events | Attend all summer sessions and required events; remain in academic good standing by institution standards |
| Timeline | Begins summer before freshman year; support continues through graduation | Begins fall of freshman year; support continues through Program C | Spring semester of freshman year; continues until student has declared a major | Begins summer before freshman year; support continues through graduation |
| Structured Mentorship | Program Director, Student Development Specialist, Peer Support | Program Director, Academic Advisor, Peer Adviser | Program Director, Academic Advisor, Peer Adviser | Program Director, Student Development Specialist, Peer Support |

Source: Host Institution Website

My research focused on the experiences of students who participated in Program A, which has the longest history at the institution. Program A is a bridge program affiliated with this campus as early as 1966, winning an American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Award for Distinguished Achievement for Excellence in Teacher Education that same year; this

program first worked with ninth and tenth grade inner city students in order to help them overcome socioeconomic barriers to academic success in high school, and eventually earn college degrees (Host institution archives). Two years later, Program A was founded on this campus in 1968 to help incoming, low-income students adjust to the culture and academic rigor of campus life (Host institution archives). The first Program A class at this institution in 1968 started with just 20 students, but it has grown substantially over time to serve approximately 65 incoming first-year students each year (Host institution archives). Since 1968, inspired by the success of the long-running Program A, three subsequent bridge programs (Programs B, C, and D) have formed to support academically underprepared students who meet various program admission criteria (T. McCarthy, personal communication, June, 2014). These subsequent bridge programs have been modeled after Program A, though they function differently in terms of admission status; unlike Program A, the only requirement to participate in Programs B and C is standardized test scores or high school GPA below the University-wide admission standard (T. McCarthy, personal communication, June, 2014). Program D has similar admission criteria to Program A, but targets students who want to pursue medicine or dentistry as a career path.

Conducting research at this institution with such a rich history of varied bridge programs is a unique opportunity to gather important data on the mentoring relationships between bridge program students and institutional agents. The history and development of programs indicates a record of experience with different and time-adapted strategies for supporting at-risk student populations. This lengthy history alone does not indicate success at supporting these students, but data on Program A's outcomes does indicate success at retaining and graduating students. The 6-year graduation rate for Program A is approximately 68%, compared to the host institution's 66.4% (Institution Fact Book, 2015-2016). Program A also boasts a 94.5% first to

second year retention rate, compared to the host institution's 83% (Institution Fact Book, 2015-2016). If the goal of a bridge program is to provide interventions to retain and graduate a diverse set of students, Program A's retention and graduation numbers indicate its ability to do so. Thus, Program A was an appropriate choice for this study, since my research delves into the components of bridge programs which help to support students.

Program Organization

Program A is led by a director who also oversees Program D. There are two associate directors and four Student Development Specialists (SDSs) who work directly within Program A. The program staff also consists of four Graduate Assistants (GAs), two academic specialists (one in English, and one in Math), one admissions counselor, and three administrative support team members. Program A's Associate Director of Counseling and Enrollment Services supervises the SDSs, the GAs and the enrollment process, while the Associate Director of the Center for Learning, Instruction and Assessment (CLIA) supervises the academic workshops and resources run through the program. Additionally, Program A employs dozens of tutors throughout the year, as well as several student-workers, who are Program A students who qualify for federal work-study assistance. Program A runs independently of all other bridge programs on campus.

Participant Sample Selection

I interviewed a sample of 10 students who completed Program A in the summer of 2016, as well as 8 practitioners identified by the student participants as mentors. The student sample included participants who met the following criteria: 1) student completed one full academic year at the institution; 2) student completed bridge Program A in the summer of 2016; and 3)

student is in good academic standing at the institution. Good academic standing at the host institution is defined by a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above.

This sample allowed me to gather data on students' experiences both within the program, and their experiences after the program concluded as the students progressed to full-time status in the subsequent fall and spring semesters. Interviewing students who had completed the summer program and progressed at the institution allowed a student view of mentorship both from the lens of within the summer program and from the general institution population. Because the summer program operates within its own bounds for the six weeks prior to students' freshman year, and because a key objective of Program A is to help students acclimate to collegiate culture and continue to succeed in their course work after completing the program, interviewing students at this point in their college progression made sense; doing so allowed students to reflect on their experiences within the program, and on how those program experiences have shaped their collegiate pursuits at the institution. While interviewing students at this point meant that student data about Program A was dependent on recall and reflection, it was valuable to see the connection between students' program experience and institutional experience. Attempting to understand that connection between program and institution, and how it relates to mentorship, was essential to responding to the study's research questions.

The student sample for this study (10) was small, due to the small total number of students enrolled in each cohort of Program A (60), and a slow response rate to recruitment efforts. This small sample size limits the ability of the study to understand many different sources of challenges and experiences for students in Program A. However, the small size of the program in general and the difficulty recruiting participants necessitated a small sample size.

Since student demographic attributes are useful in data analysis, I gathered that data from students via an optional student in-take form; that data was incorporated into my analysis after data collection concluded (see Table 4 below). Due to the small sample size and an initial slow response rate for study participation, student attributes did not limit the sample of student participants in this study. Since all bridge program students from Programs A are considered at-risk in some way, all students who met the criteria above were eligible for my student participant sample. By not limiting the selection criteria according to student attributes, I was able to gain a broad understanding of how Program A students respond to the program, the institution and mentors in general. Future studies with larger sample sizes may be able to provide more detailed and specific information by using student attributes to limit the selection criteria and focusing the study in that way.

Table 4.1: Description of Student Participants

| Name* | Age | Gender | GPA Range | Major | Race/Ethnicity | Credits Reported | First Gen? |
|-------------------|------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Winston Parker | 19 | M | 2.51 – 3.0 | Economics | Black or African-American | 32 | Y |
| Zoe Williams | 19 | F | 2.51 – 3.0 | Visual & Sound Production | Black or African-American | 59 | N |
| Cynthia Hernandez | 19 | F | 2.01 – 2.5 | Pre-Science | Hispanic or Latino/a | 42 | N |
| Sophie Anderson | 19 | F | 3.51 – 4.0 | Psychology and Social Work | Hispanic or Latino/a | 41 | Y |
| Isabelle Morales | 19 | F | 3.01 – 3.5 | Secondary Education and Biology | Hispanic or Latino/a | 66 | Y, in U.S.A. |
| Kimberly Arman | 19 | F | 3.51 – 4.0 | Occupational Therapy | Asian or Pacific Islander | 36 | N |
| Reggie Michaels | 20 | M | 3.51 – 4.0 | Business | Black or African-American | 48 | N |
| Helen Lopez | 20 | F | 3.51 – 4.0 | Economics | Hispanic or Latino/a | 48 | Y |
| Daniela Martin | 20 | F | 3.51 – 4.0 | Marketing and Economics | Asian or Pacific Islander | 41 | Y, in U.S.A. |
| Stephanie Ramirez | 19 | F | 3.51 – 4.0 | Nursing | Hispanic or Latino/a | 37 | Y |

*All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

Table 4.2: Description of Mentor Participants

| Name* | Gender | Role at the Institution | Employed Directly by Program? | Experience |
|-----------------|---------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| James Perry | M | Associate Director of Program A | Y | At institution for over 11 years |
| Mary Romano | F | Academic Advisor | N | Over 5 years of experience in higher education |
| Ann Marie Jones | F | Student Development Specialist | Y | Has been in current role for 17 years |
| Daniel Bishop | M | Student Development Specialist | Y | Alumnus of Program A; has worked in some capacity for Program A for past 6 years |
| Jane Richardson | F | English Faculty Member | N | Has been teaching for over 30 years; taught in Program A for 10 years and 5 years non-concurrent stretches |
| Margaret Lucas | F | English instructor and Academic Specialist | Y | Has worked with Program A for almost 25 years |
| Simon Rivera | M | Student Development Specialist | Y | Has worked in current role for four years |
| Matthew Lauren | M | Director | Y | At institution for over 10 years |

*All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

Data Collection – Phase I

The research design was divided into Phase I and Phase II. In Phase I, I gathered contextual information about Program A using document analysis; I also interviewed the director of Program A to gain an understanding of the program and its core programming components (See Appendix A for Bridge Program Director Protocol). I analyzed course syllabi, program descriptions, summer session schedules, admission letters, student contracts, and program brochures to more fully understand the program requirements and structure. Phase I also included interviews with student participants, gathering information about their experiences in the bridge programs, at the institution and with any mentors they may identify. Originally, Phase

I was to include observations as part of data collection, but restrictions from the host institution's Institutional Research Board made an amendment to the research plan necessary.

Students were recruited for participation in several different ways. The Program A department secretary as well as the operations director from the Freshman Studies department on campus distributed my letter of solicitation via email to students who met my sample criteria. Flyers soliciting participation were constructed and posted in and around Program A's main office, and around campus. Additionally, I visited one of Program A's monthly meetings to make an announcement about my study and solicit student participants. I also left hand-outs soliciting study participation at the desk in the Program A office. Program A's secretary sent a follow-up recruitment email approximately two months after the initial email was sent to students. Since initial response to my recruitment strategies were very low, I offered students a \$5 Dunkin Donuts gift card for their participation in the study. When the recruitment response slowed again, I then offered students a \$10 Dunkin Donuts gift card for their participation.

Phase I interviews were conducted using the Student Interview Protocol (See Appendix A). This protocol was reviewed by four practitioners at the institution who frequently work with freshman and sophomore students. After receiving feedback on clarity and relevance of questions, I modified the Student Interview Protocol accordingly. After scheduling an interview time with student participants via email, I sent a confirmation email the night before or the morning of the interview. This message included my phone number for any rescheduling needs, and a reminder about the location of our interview. I met with students in a classroom or conference room on campus. Once the student arrived to the interview, I thanked them for participation, reminded them that participation was voluntary and could end at any time. I then asked the student to take as long as needed to review the consent form and to sign if they gave

consent to be interviewed and recorded. After obtaining consent, I gave students an optional in-take survey, reminding them that all information they shared would be kept confidential, and that completing the form was also optional. All students signed the consent form, agreeing to be recorded; all students filled out the in-take form, which asked students for information on major, GPA, race/ethnicity, etc.

Student interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. At the conclusion of the interview, I asked students if they had any questions for me, thanked them for their time and gave them a Dunkin Donuts gift card which they were promised in the recruitment messages. After Phase I data was gathered, interviews were transcribed and field notes gathered. The main codes and themes that emerged from Phase I data were used to inform edits of the protocol used in Phase II.

Data Collection – Phase II

In my student interviews, I asked each participant if he/she felt that he/she has had a mentor at the institution whom the student met during his/her time in the bridge program. A mentor was defined as someone the student views as a role model, and someone from whom the student would seek advice, even if not required to do so. Each student identified at least one mentor; a couple pairs of students named the same mentor. The list of practitioners identified as mentors by the student participants became my practitioner sample. I included all practitioners in the sample who met the following criteria: (1) a student participant identified that person as a mentor, (2) the bridge program student first met or interacted with the mentor while participating in the bridge program, and (3) the mentor was a member of the institution community (employed as either staff, faculty, administrator) when he/she met the student. In some cases, the practitioners included in the sample were the advisors assigned to students through the bridge

program. One participant in the practitioner sample was named by several students as influential and supportive when discussing their experiences in Program A. Even though this practitioner was not named explicitly as a mentor, it seemed important to include her in the practitioner sample since she was mentioned by name by four of the student participants. No other practitioner was mentioned by name by more than one student, except for the mentors included in the study.

In the second phase of data collection, I interviewed practitioner participants about their experience mentoring bridge program students. After Phase I interviews were complete, I emailed the nominated mentors directly to ask for their participation. As each mentor agreed to participate, I scheduled the interview via email. I offered to meet the participants wherever they felt comfortable on campus. Most mentors asked to be interviewed in their offices, while one mentor asked to meet in a neutral location, in the institution's student center. Upon arriving to each interview, I thanked the mentor for participating and asked him/her to review the consent form for as long as needed. All mentor participants signed the consent form, and all but one mentor agreed to be recorded. For that interview, I took notes during the conversation, checking many statements with the participant as the interview proceeded. All other interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder; interviews lasted anywhere from 40 to 60 minutes, depending on the availability of the participant.

In these interviews, I used the Mentor Interview Protocol (See Appendix C). The goal of the practitioner interviews was to uncover the underlying ideas and philosophies that guide the mentor's work with students. I asked mentors about their interactions with students, including frequency and type of interaction (in class, outside of class, etc.), as well as how the mentor sees

his or her actions influencing a student's college experience. Interviews were transcribed and coded after the conclusion of Phase II interviews.

Interviewing both students and practitioners allowed me to triangulate the data gathered from students and mentors in order to better understand the mentoring relationships described and how those relationships influence or do not influence the student's campus engagement and sense of academic confidence. This sampling technique also allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how a mentoring relationship forms and grows.

Data Analysis

Documents were analyzed early in Phase I to give context to the subsequent student and mentor interviews. Documents were reviewed for content, information about program design and implementation that would prove important to the interview process. This review offered a better understanding of how Program A works, the goals of the program, and how the program is presented to incoming students. Codes were applied to documents for later comparison to student and mentor interview data; the information gleaned from document analysis was used to reinforce and confirm data obtained from student and mentor interviews.

Interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participant being interviewed. Interviews were transcribed and stored using the pseudonyms assigned to participants. I transcribed interviews myself so that I was able to review each conversation with participants and better understand the responses and interaction. In Phase I, I took field notes and wrote researcher memos during document analysis, again avoiding the use of any identifying characteristics in this material.

Once this data was gathered, it was coded using an inductive reasoning process to allow themes to emerge from the gathered data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Instead of beginning the

process of gathering data with a hypothesis to prove or disprove, I waited to see what conclusions and patterns appeared throughout my document analysis and interview transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I open-coded each transcript as soon as possible after the set of interviews were complete; coding for student transcripts began after the set of student interviews were transcribed, and coding for mentor transcripts began after the set of practitioner interviews were transcribed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Once all data was gathered, I looked for common themes and patterns that emerged from the data.

Bogdan & Biklen (2007) define coding as the process of searching through “data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics” covered by the data, and then recording “words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns” (p. 173). While the specific codes themselves emerged only once the data is gathered and analyzed, there are several types of codes for which I was vigilant. Since my focus was uncovering potential engagement and academic confidence development, activity codes (codes that note “regularly occurring kinds of behavior,” whether they are formal or informal (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 176) concerning participation in institution events, classes, organizations, clubs, and living communities, were important. Additionally, process codes, codes that indicate something has changed over time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) regarding any changes in perspective of those events and the student’s ability to contribute to those events, were considered important when coding student participant transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Similarly, in practitioner interviews, strategy codes (codes that refer to “the tactics, methods, techniques...and other conscious ways people accomplish various things” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 177) were prioritized in order to gain a sense of how practitioners may be knowingly or unknowingly fostering a mentoring relationship with a student and/or developing a student’s engagement or sense of academic confidence (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Finally, relationship and social structure codes were important to interviews with both students and practitioners. These codes make note of “regular patterns of behavior” that are not designed or officially defined by an organizational structure (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 177). For example, an advising meeting in which a student discusses required classes for next semester may indicate an interaction designed by the organizational structure (the bridge program), but a student-mentor meeting in which they discuss the student’s career goals and how family responsibilities may be influencing those aspirations might indicate a relationship and social structure code. These codes were useful to me since they helped me to understand how a mentorship bond is formed and developed.

After initial review of the student set of transcripts, a number of codes were developed which were applied to close analysis of the student transcripts. Activity codes included “campus resources” and “involvement” while process codes included “dealing with marginalization” and “rigorous program.” Relationship and social structure codes included “individual attention,” and “family.” For mentors, strategy codes included “intrusive approach” and “developing ownership,” while social and relationship codes included “holistic approach” and “motivational support.” After all transcripts were coded, student and mentor codes were compared and correlated, where it was possible and relevant to do so (e.g. holistic approach and multiple aspects of support). Then, after reviewing excerpts of transcripts and documents with corresponding codes, I devised a list of patterns and themes that emerged from the analysis. After closely reviewing the initial list of patterns and themes and comparing the data behind it, I combined those themes that were closely aligned, and eliminated those with insufficient supporting data (e.g. a process code that appeared in one or two student interviews which, upon analysis, was more closely related to a different theme).

Study Limitations

This study was limited in its small scale and single-institution participant base. The participant sample is not especially large, and all students and practitioners are based at the same institution. Additionally, 80% of the student participants were female. This is somewhat reflective of Program A's constituency, which is approximately 60% female, and of the eligible student sample from Program A, which is closer to 70% female. The mentor sample was divided evenly by gender, with four female participants and four male participants.

Many student participants responded to recruitment efforts as a result of email communication or an announcement at a required meeting. This may indicate that the student sample consists of students who are disproportionately diligent in checking their email and responding to program requirements. Additionally, since students self-selected into participating in the study, the sample may represent a disproportionate number of students who feel strongly about Program A and/or feel compelled to help promote a positive image of the program. However, since the purpose of the study was to examine mentoring relationships, a sample of students who had a positive experience in the program is appropriate, since they may have been more likely to have developed such a relationship.

While the findings of this study may be transferable to other institutions, they are not intended for generalization to broad situations. Rather, my research was focused on better understanding the mentorship of bridge program students and how things work and do not work in a specific environment. The data gathered yielded insights into the mentorship of bridge program students, but not into how all practitioners work with all bridge program students. However, I hope that my research provided some insight into different approaches for working with bridge program students which may inform practitioners' approaches in the future.

Role of the Researcher

I have been interested in bridge programs since my days as a graduate assistant in 2006 when I worked with a summer bridge program on the host institution's campus (this bridge program has since been eliminated). I was inspired by the way that consistent academic support offered by passionate practitioners could influence the way a student viewed him or herself and consequently, how that view would impact classroom performance. Similarly, I was dismayed at how student development sometimes did *not* happen, and despite the program staff's best efforts, a student would finish the summer or fall semester on academic probation or even dismissed from the institution, with the burden of considerable loans and without the advantage of a college degree or even transferable college credits. I take very seriously the role that bridge program practitioners play in students' lives, since I have seen first-hand both the success stories and the failures. Since my work within that program, and in my continued work in the world of academic affairs, I have continued to wonder if there was some way to know what works best when mentoring at-risk students, and what drives at-risk students away – from success, from the institution, from the mentor.

As an active practitioner, I brought to this study more than 10 years of experience working with college students of all different levels of achievement. As in all qualitative research, the bias of the researcher may be a limitation of the study. Preconceived ideas about bridge programs, students and the practitioners within the programs leaves room for subjectivity in the interview and data analysis processes. However, researcher subjectivity as a limitation can be reduced or made inconsequential by careful actions taken by the researcher. In addition to identifying and compensating for any biases and experiences I have had previously with bridge programs in researcher memos, I have looked at data gathered from multiple sources – student

interviews, practitioner interviews, document analysis – which helped to ensure dependability and comprehensiveness of the data.

Further, the experience I have brought to this research has allowed me an insider's view, as I am familiar with student-mentor relationships and how they are built. While this may suggest a predilection toward my own strategies and habits, I have not worked with bridge program students in several years, and it has been nine years since I worked as a part of a bridge program staff. In many ways, my approaches and strategies for working with students are much different now, having spent three years as an administrator within an academic department. This experience outside the world of bridge programs, in addition to conducting an extensive literature review on bridge programs and at-risk students, has shown me how different it is to work with bridge program and at-risk students than it is to work with traditional students. This mentality of distinction allowed me to separate my own strategies for working with traditional students from those I learned about through my research. Thus, in many ways, I approached this research on bridge programs – and their students and mentors – with a set of fresh eyes.

Dependability and Comprehensiveness of the Data

To ensure the dependability and comprehensiveness of the study, data was triangulated by interviewing both students and institutional mentors and by reviewing relevant program documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This technique allowed me to verify information about procedures, policies and student-mentor interactions. Viewing similar experiences from these two different perspectives has added dependability to the study. Further, analyzing course syllabi, program descriptions, and student contracts used by the program helped to enrich the data gathered from interviews. The information gathered from this document analysis provided specific information about class requirements and available resources, which was then further

corroborated in student and mentor interviews. Although students were aware of the study's focus on Program A, students were asked about their broad experiences at the institution in addition to their experiences in Program A.

In addition to triangulation of the data, informal member-checking throughout participant interviews helped to ensure validity for this study. However, as Cho & Trent (2006) discuss, these procedural methods do not ensure validity on their own; additionally, researchers must take a holistic view of the study and its purposes, closely monitoring the co-construction of data (Cho & Trent, 2006). In my study, the use of "rich descriptions," or those interpretations focused on "locally constructed meanings" and not obtained by attempts to seek grand, transferable conclusions, helped to ensure the validity of the findings (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 333). The data collection and analysis processes were recursive, using protocols and a coding approach applied to each data point. A recursive approach also contributes to validity (Cho & Trent, 2006), as it allows the essential processes to be repeated both within the study by researcher and after the study as researchers attempt to expand upon or question the findings.

Ethical and Privacy Considerations

All interview participants were informed that their responses would be kept confidential, that their participation was completely voluntary, and that no one associated with the program would be aware of their participation or their responses. Interview transcripts were available to be shared with participants upon request, in which case a hard copy would be provided for the participant to view in person with the researcher present to answer any questions. However, none of the participants requested to see their interview transcripts.

Conclusion

This study provided rich, in-depth data detailing the experiences of both bridge program students and their mentors. A qualitative approach was appropriate for understanding the ways that a mentoring relationship is formed and contributes to a student's meaningful engagement. Only with the "open-ended," "naturalistic" approach that qualitative research allows (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 3), could students and mentors express the depth of their experiences. My research design was structured to gain a deeper understanding of mentoring relationships within a program and beyond it, as well as a perspective of how engagement develops from angle of both the student and the institution, with the practitioner as its agent.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I will provide a summary of the findings of my study, organized according to those themes devised by the research questions and those that became apparent during data analysis. The first section of the findings focuses on Structure of the Summer Program and the second section focuses on Mentoring Relationships; each section is then divided into subsections based on themes and patterns that emerged in data analysis. This chapter will also provide summary descriptions of the participants in the study sample, and a list of terminology used in discussing the findings.

Outline of Findings, Organized by Section and Subsection

- I. Structure of the Summer Program
 - a. Regular, frequent interaction with program staff
 - b. Academic Challenge and Support
 - c. Campus Resources
 - d. Student-Faculty Relationships
 - e. The Family Atmosphere
- II. Mentoring Relationships
 - a. Individualized, adapted approach
 - b. Holistic Approach
 - c. Developing Ownership
 - d. Equity-mindedness and Student Motivation
 - e. Campus Presence
 - f. Navigating the System

Terminology Used in Chapter 4

Throughout Chapter 4, I have used several terms to refer to specific roles or populations:

The mentors or mentor participants refers to the sample of study participants who were identified as mentors by students, and then interviewed for the study.

An **SDS** is a Student Development Specialist, a specific role within the program. Several SDSs were named as mentors in the study. However, sometimes student participants discussed interactions with an SDS whom they did not name specifically as a mentor.

An **advisor** refers to any institutional staff member who is responsible for academic advising at the University. One advisor was named as a mentor in the study.

A **faculty mentor** refers to the faculty members who were named as mentors in the study.

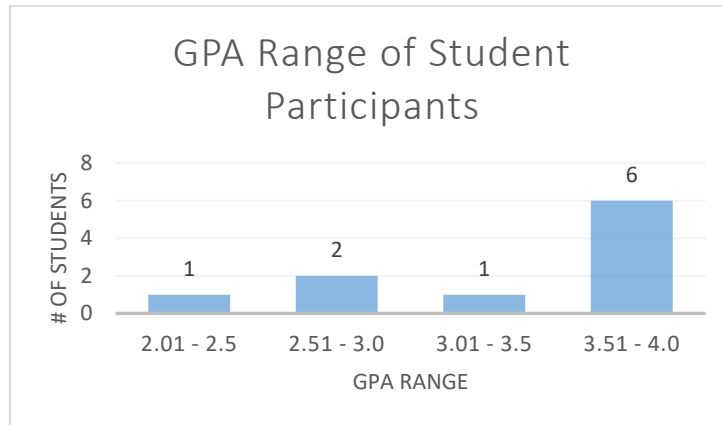
The Students

Most student participants were either 19 years old (8 students) or 20 years old (2 students). Students' majors include Economics, Visual Media & Sound Production, Pre-Science, Psychology, Social Work, Secondary Education, Biology, Business Undecided, Marketing, Nursing and Occupational Therapy.

Seven of the student participants are first generation college students, or the first person in their family to go to college. Two students reported that they were the first person in their family to go to college in the United States, and one student reported that he did have a relative who attended college, but he had no contact with that relative. Three students are not first generation college students.

All student participants completed in Program A's summer program in 2016. They were enrolled in their 3rd full-time semester at the University when the study was conducted. While all students reported sophomore standing, students reported having earned a range of 32 and 66 credits. This disparity can be attributed to a number of factors: some students may have included their Spring 2018, in-progress courses in calculating their credit total, while others did not. Some students earned Advanced Placement or transfer credits before the summer program began, while others did not. Additionally, some students completed courses during the Summer 2017 term while others did not.

Five student participants identify as Hispanic/Latino, three identify as Black or African-American, and two identify as Asian or Pacific-Islander.



Winston Parker* is a 19 year-old Economics major with 32 credits. His GPA is in the 2.51- 3.0 range, and he is the first person in his family to attend college. He describes his race/ethnicity as Black or African-American.

Zoe Williams is a 19 year-old Visual Media and Sound Production major with 59 credits and a GPA in the 2.51-3.0 range. She is not the first person in her family to attend college, and describes her race/ethnicity as Black or African-American.

Cynthia Hernandez is a 19 year-old Pre-Science major with 42 credits. Her GPA is between 2.01 and 2.5, and she is not the first person in her family to attend college. She describes her race/ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino.

Sophie Anderson is a 19 year-old Psychology and Social Work major with 41 credits. Her GPA is between 3.51 and 4.0. She is the first person in her family to attend college, and describes her race/ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino.

Isabelle Morales is a 19 year-old Secondary Education and Biology major with 66 credits. Her GPA is between 3.01 and 3.5. Although she is not the first person in her family to go to college, she is the first person in her family to attend college in the United States. She describes her race/ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino.

Kimberly Arman is a 19 year-old Occupational Therapy major with 36 credits. Her GPA is between 3.51 and 4.0, and she is not the first person in her family to attend college. She describes her race/ethnicity as Asian or Pacific Islander.

Reggie Michaels is a 20 year-old Business major with 47 credits and a GPA between 3.51 and 4.0. He is not the first person in his family to attend college, though he noted that he had had no

contact with the only person who did attend college in his family. He describes his race/ethnicity as Black or African-American.

Helen Lopez is a 19 year-old Economics major with 48 credits and a GPA between 3.51 and 4.0. She is the first person in her family to attend college, and describes her race/ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino.

Daniela Martin is a 20 year-old Marketing and Economics major with 41 credits and a GPA between 3.51 and 4.0. She is the first person in her family to attend college in the United States, and describes her race/ethnicity as Asian or Pacific Islander.

Stephanie Ramirez is a 19 year-old Nursing major with 37 credits and a GPA between 3.51 and 4.0. She is the first person in her family to attend college and describes her race/ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino.

The Mentors

A total of 8 institutional agents were identified as mentors by the student participants. All agents named were interviewed for the study; 7 were named specifically as mentors by student participants, and some agents were named by multiple students. While the 8th mentor participant was not named specifically when students were asked to name a mentor, she was named in several student interviews as someone who made a positive impact on their summer bridge program experience, and on their campus experience in general. Although not all mentor participants provided information about race/ethnicity or family background, some did. Within the participant sample, mentors represented the following race/ethnicity groups: Black or African-American, Latino/Hispanic, and White/Caucasian. Several mentor participants identified themselves as having been first generation college students. The director of the program was interviewed twice, once in Phase I of data collection to gather context about the program, and once in Phase II, after a student named him as a mentor.

James Perry* is one of the associate directors in the program. He identified himself as a first-generation college student, and an alumnus of a similar bridge program. He has been working full-time at the University for over 11 years.

Mary Romano is an academic advisor and has been working at the University for just over a year. She has over 5 years of experience working in higher education.

Ann Marie Jones is an SDS in the program. She has been working for the program in some capacity for the past 17 years.

Daniel Bishop is an SDS in the program who has experience working at all levels of education (from pre-K to college students). He is an alumnus of the bridge program and has been working in the program for approximately 6 years.

Jane Richardson is a faculty member in the English department who worked with the program for about 10 years starting in the late 1990s. After teaching at another institution for approximately 15 years, she came back to the University, and has been teaching in the summer bridge program since 2013.

Margaret Lucas is an English instructor and academic specialist in the program. She has been at the University for over 25 years, and working with the program for most of that time.

Matthew Lauren is the director of the program and has worked at the University in some capacity for over 10 years.

Simon Rivera is an SDS. He has worked in the program for almost four years.

*All study participants have been assigned pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

Results

The results of the study are divided into two major sections: I. Structure of the Summer Program, and II. Mentor Relationships. Each major section is then divided into sub-sections of thematic categories which arose from the coded data.

I. Structure of the Summer Program

Regular, Frequent Interaction with Program Staff

The structure of the 6-week summer program requires constant contact between program students and staff. Students have an extremely rigid and specific schedule during the six weeks, which spans Monday through Thursday from about 7 am until around 10 pm and on Friday from about 7 am until around 4 pm. A typical day starts with breakfast, followed by two class sessions; one class is three hours long, and the other 1.5 hours long. Depending on the day, students have a combination of two of the following courses: English, Sociology and Math. Students then go to lunch, have time for advisement and homework, and then attend a 1-credit seminar on college and life skills. Then, from 4:30-6 pm, students have time for additional advisement, tutoring, structured study or other events or activities planned by the program. Evening tutoring sessions run from 7-9 pm; students then have activities or events in the residence halls. All parts of the schedule are mandatory, providing opportunities for students to interact with potential mentors.

When students first arrive to campus for the summer program, they are each assigned a Student Development Specialist (SDS) who works within the program. As one student, Stephanie Ramirez, described, the SDSs are “like mentors, and they guide us. They help us choose what classes we may need, they guide us toward our other advisors and things like that.” Students described SDSs as like an advisor, but someone who seems to know them

better and works with them on various challenges and issues, beyond what an academic major advisor might provide. A student's SDS provides guidance for students in any aspect of life that may impact a student's academic performance. SDS mentor participants discussed the unique nature of their role, in that it allows them to work with students on issues beyond the scope of registration and surface level GPA concerns. Indeed, the relationship between student and SDS is expected to be a close one. One student explained: "She's my SDS, so yeah. That's why I've been able to form a close bond with her. She kind of knows, like what's been going on in my life."

During interviews, all student participants mentioned communicating with an SDS and the mandatory meetings held with them, which begin in the summer program. Each student will have a one-on-one meeting with their SDS at least once a week during the summer program; these formal meetings are worked into the weekly schedule, and are seen as a starting point for the long term relationship which will develop between student and SDS which, in most cases, will last for the student's college career. From the very beginning of the student-SDS relationship, at the start of the summer program, students sign contracts specifying the frequency of SDS meetings they are required to attend. In addition to the required, structured meetings, students will sometimes drop in to see an SDS with a question or concern; the structure of the summer schedule allows frequent interaction to occur on a regular basis.

In addition to formal and informal meetings with an assigned SDS, students will connect with program staff in a 1-credit course that meets during the summer, taught by all the SDSs. Both students and mentor study participants refer to this course as the EXAC class, although they were unsure of what the acronym EXAC stands for. The meaning behind the original

acronym seems lost, but the title of the course – Success Oriented Skills – gives insight into what it offers to students. This program specific seminar includes instruction of academic skills, discussions of emotional intelligence, exercises which help students to identify what barriers they are facing with regard to navigating through college, and whatever additional content the program director and staff feel will be helpful to the students’ success. Multiple student participants mentioned this course as playing an important and positive role in their experiences with the summer program. This course is a way for students to meet and work with all the program staff. One student, Daniela Martin, pointed out [regarding SDSs]: “We all like know who they are, just because they taught one of the classes in the summer program.” In addition to creating a general familiarity between students and program staff, this 1-credit course creates the foundations for significant and trustworthy mentoring relationships to develop as the summer progresses. One student mentioned an SDS, to whom she is not assigned, but met through the summer program, by saying he [the SDS]

was one who’s had a big impact on my life as well, because during the summer, he was part of my EXAC class and then, I know like a lot of tears were shed during that class. All the students were able to open up...It was kind of like a safe space for us to talk. So I feel like I could go to him for anything, like I could trust him with anything that was going on personally.

The EXAC class creates the opportunity for students to interact with potential mentors on a regular basis; during the class, staff lead students through discussions about what brought them to college, what values guide their decisions, what challenges they see for themselves in the semesters ahead, and how they might overcome those challenges – all topics which encourage the kind of relationship that goes beyond advising and toward mentorship. Since they require students to bring their own personal experiences into the classroom, these topics also encourage

reflective and integrative learning, an indicator of engagement (NSSE Indicators of Engagement, 2018).

In addition to mandatory one-on-one meetings and the EXAC class, students interact with program staff and upper class program students regularly as a result of the summer structure. Part of the weekly schedule includes workshops, events and activities run by program staff and by the upper class program students who volunteer their time over the summer. All of these activities are required. Students might be mandated to attend a workshop on note-taking skills taught by one of the program tutors, an activity fair in which many different campus clubs and organizations are represented, or a team-building activity led by an SDS, designed to help students get to know each other and program staff. SDS and mentor participant Ann Marie Jones discussed the way workshops are planned for the summer program:

Something that's very crucial in that is something we do called personal improvement workshops...where whatever areas we think they need to develop we'll have presenters or we'll present ourselves on these areas. And we don't just speak to them as an audience. We make sure it's very interactive.

In this way, the activities, workshops and events that are part of the mandatory weekly schedule provide a way for students not just to gather information about important topics, but to connect with potential mentors on a regular basis, and with frequency. This structure, and focus on interaction instead of lecturing, helps students and program staff to connect throughout the summer on a few different levels. One student said she began to get to know her mentor after a talent show during the summer program. She explains:

I was also really shy, so I didn't really talk to him much at all that summer. I remember I really got a taste of him, for when we had our talent show? He can sing! ...So that was just a personable thing I learned about him which really made him more relatable I guess.

These required activities and events allow students to meet and interact with program staff on a personal level, increasing their bond and building the trust between them.

Program staff and upper class students also stay in the residence halls with the students Monday through Friday, which provides additional interaction between students and potential mentors. Students talked about the after-hours time spent in the residence halls with PCs (personal counselors, or upper class students who assist in running the summer program; they are alumni of the summer program themselves). Sometimes there are structured activities or sometimes they are just gathered in a lounge to sit and talk. Simon Rivera, an SDS and mentor, noted the effects of having program staff in the residence halls during the summer program, explaining that their presence allows for additional opportunities to connect with and support program students:

I'm not just there with them in the morning, but I'm there with them after 5pm...it's me and the rest of our staff, our student staff. And we are navigating some of these questions and encouraging students to meet with each other, and doing these programs and these social events for students.

In this way, the program structure keeps students interacting with potential mentors long after the last class has ended, after the last tutoring session has finished. Maintaining programming in the residence halls also gives program staff the chance to learn even more about their students since they are interacting in a more informal environment. Program staff can then share with their fellow staff what they have learned about students while in the residence halls, thus offering all members of the staff this important insight into students' experiences. Rivera goes on to explain:

Our summer program allows us to be really intentional with working with students...since our students meet with us every single week, but then because I'm there every single night, I can pick up on these things [issues students are having]. And then the next morning when

their counselor [SDS] comes in, it's like 'oh hey, this is what your student was experiencing. You should follow up during lunch.'

The structure and practice of information-sharing among program staff allows for the program to maximize time with students during the summer program. Each hour of the day is carefully designed with the intent to not only educate students, but to expose them to key people and resources.

Another part of the summer program structure which encourages mentorship is called *Build-Up*. Build-Up is the peer mentoring network which pairs a student in the summer program with an upper class program student. As the Build-Up handbook describes:

First year students are assigned a sophomore, junior or senior student as a partner. These partners are continuously trained to assist, guide, and support first year students through their academic, personal and professional goals.

Almost all student participants mentioned Build-Up in their interviews. Cynthia Hernandez discussed the way she met her Build-Up peer mentor and how the relationship developed with ease:

We had a picnic type thing at the end of the six weeks. I saw her, and I don't know, during the first semester, she reached out to me a lot and asked me if I'm okay and everything. And she just – we just really clicked together.

Students discussed the advantages of being paired with someone who had been through the program already and who was familiar with the campus environment. Though it's not always possible to do so, several students mentioned that they were assigned to students from the same major. There are events organized throughout the academic year for students to get together with their Build-Up mentors, but most students talked about interactions that involved texting, studying together, coffee breaks, and more informal time together. These interactions seem

focused more on coping with the non-academic stressors of college life, rather than specific courses or academic skills:

I don't really go to her [my Build-Up mentor] for academic stuff. I go to her if I'm like stressed out about like – if I have family problems, you know like personal stuff. And how you can like balance that with college life.

Build-Up is the most straight-forward way that the summer program provides peer mentorship for students. While other parts of the summer program structure – mandatory tutoring, activities and workshops with PCs, etc. – foster interaction with potential peer mentors, Build-Up assigns each student a peer mentor, which could be helpful for those students who might not be outgoing enough to connect with the various upper class students they meet in other ways.

SDS and mentor participant Jones said the structure of the summer program “really is the path to developing this relationship [between student and SDS].” However, it is just the beginning of this relationship, as part of the structure of summer program remains in place during the fall semester for students: at the start of the fall semester, students are required to sign contracts committing to regular meetings with their SDS, as well as structured study hours in the program offices. The frequency of the meetings and the study hours depend on the student's GPA. Program director Matthew Lauren explains:

We have regular check-ins with our students...they're signing service agreement forms during the fall semester that requires their – it outlines their required number of meetings with their Student Development Specialist, structured study, mandatory tutoring, things that they're supposed to do to be engaged as a student. They have to attend monthly community meetings, where the entire program meets.

In this way, some structure from the summer program persists throughout the fall semester, and beyond. While structured study hours continue only through the fall semester, contracts and required meetings with SDSs continue to graduation. Although mandatory meetings throughout a

student's college career may seem burdensome, students describe seeing their SDSs more often than they are required, as sophomores. Hernandez's comment regarding the frequency of her meetings with her SDS is typical of the other students in the study: "We have scheduled meetings like once a month. But usually I see him an extra time (laughs) because I have questions or something." That successful, upper class students feel comfortable or even committed to working with program staff so frequently is in many ways a result of the summer program structure. The summer program sets in motion a structure that allows program students regular and frequent interaction with program staff, both full-time professionals and upper class students, who may serve as mentors. Perhaps once students get used to that regular, constant support and interaction, especially during a rigorous and intense 6-week academic experience, they see it as a crucial part of their collegiate lives as they move forward.

Academic Challenge and Support

The rigorous nature of the 6-week summer bridge program is one of its defining characteristics. Students adhere to a strict, packed schedule of classes, tutorials, events, workshops, advisement, social meetings, and team-building activities for the entirety of the program. When asked about the summer program, all of the students had a similar reaction and commented on the intensity of it. Hernandez stated, "It was really hard. I had like no idea what was happening (laughs). Like the whole 6 weeks, I'm like are you serious?" while Zoe Williams described the program as "the worst boot camp that I ever had, waking up at 6 o'clock in the morning, not getting in until 8 o'clock at night...And then as soon as you get in, you have to do, like so much homework." All of the students describe the program as intense and difficult, but they also describe their experiences with a degree of cheerfulness and sentimentality. Clearly, students perceive the summer program as having been a great challenge, requiring a lot of hard work and discipline. But in addition to commenting on the intensity of the program, students

laughed, rolled their eyes, or took deep breaths with a big smile as they recalled their 6-week experiences. While they were quick to talk about the difficulty of the program, they also seemed to reflect on it with fondness and an appreciation for its intensity.

This intensity of the program clearly made an impact on students, but despite the difficulty that came along with the academic challenge presented by the summer program, all students expressed an appreciation for that level of rigor they endured. Kimberly Arman said:

Okay, so the summer was very (laughs)...difficult at first, but it was like really rewarding. I gotta say, by the end of it...I realized how much I was gonna miss it all, how much I learned from it, how much I benefited from the tutoring, from all the structured study hours.

Students frequently used words like “rewarding,” “helpful,” and “confidence” to reflect upon completing the academic challenge that was the summer program. For students, succeeding through the academic challenges of the summer program gave them a comfort level with campus and college life that eased their transition into the fall semester, as well as a confidence in their ability to complete college-level work at an accelerated pace. For many students, successfully completing the rigorous summer program was the ‘mastery experience’ of self-efficacy theory, proving to themselves that they were capable of achieving within college classes (Sander & Sanders, 2006). Anderson explained, “we also learned how to be ahead of the game in a way, because it teaches you exactly how college classes work, and how fast and demanding they may be.” As Williams put it, “When I came in during the fall semester, I felt a confidence that a lot of the other freshmen didn’t feel...I had already gotten past the worst of it, so I was just like, this is gonna be totally easy.”

This comfort level with the college experience would be beneficial for any student, but seems especially important for at-risk students, who may often feel intimidated and

overwhelmed by college level work for a number of reasons, including first-generation status, or inadequate preparation at the high school level. Earning seven college credits in an intense, academically rigorous atmosphere can help students feel acclimated to the way a college campus works, and help them to feel more confident about their academic skills. When beginning as full-time college students for the first time in the fall semester, they know what to expect from the campus and from their professors, and they have already adopted a number of behaviors and strategies that will help them to continue to be successful as they move forward. Perhaps most importantly, when they begin to face challenges in the fall semester, when they are in a bigger pool of students who may not feel the same intimidation about college level work, success in the summer bridge program serves as validation that they are capable, hard-working and high-achieving college students. If the program were less academically rigorous, or if the academic challenge was not perceived as such, students may not experience that growth in confidence or comfort level.

More specifically, when students were asked about their confidence levels in specific areas (as guided by Sander & Sanders (2006) Academic Confidence Scale), all reported a growth in confidence in at least one area, and all attributed that growth at least in part, to the academic rigors of the summer program. When asked about her growth in confidence in feeling able to keep up with and learn new class material, Helen Lopez said, "that was honestly the summer program." Morales agreed, when it came to her confidence in her ability to pass her classes:

Well, I did good over the summer, which really helped...it was based on a college schedule ya know, we had like every other day for a certain amount of time period, so it was a really good taste of what the rest of the year would be like.

Several students also talked about their confidence level growing with regard to their writing skills as a result of the rigorous nature of the program. Helen commented, "we were writing so

much and so fast. I was forced to really sit down and just pull out papers in like a week.” This challenge encourages students to rely on the support systems that are in place for them. Several students talked about working with their English professors, the Writing Center instructors, and the program tutors to help them get through the rigorous summer course load. This fosters confidence not just in the students themselves, but in the support staff upon whom the students rely. Students expressed an appreciation for the efforts of instructors and tutors, as well as the comfort they felt knowing that those support structures would be in place for the fall semester and beyond. Perhaps if the summer program were not so rigorous, students would not take advantage of those resources, or perhaps not see their value. In this way, the academic challenge of the summer program supports its goal of creating meaningful connections between students and student support services in order to instill a confidence in using those resources once the fall semester begins.

The mentors also discussed the intensity of the summer program. Mary Romano called it a “very, very rigorous process,” and Daniel Bishop acknowledged how challenging the program is for students: “They don’t get a lot of sleep (laughs).” In many ways, the summer program is intense for the program staff and faculty as well as for the students. For those six weeks in the summer, program staff, faculty and tutors work long hours with the program students. They feel the strain of a packed schedule and tight deadlines along with the students. However, the mentors view the intensity of the summer program similarly to the way students view it: it is purposefully rigorous in order to help students develop confidence in themselves, to bring students together as a cohort, and to bring students closer to the support staff of the program and the University. Margaret Lucas noted that the summer program was so intense, but that because of it, “we become so close to our students.” Several mentors mentioned the time they spend with the

students during this intense period as something that builds relationships between them. Like the students, they acknowledge its difficulty, but appreciate its purpose and the ultimate positive impact it has on students. Mentors made a few indirect references to the summer program's major time commitment for them personally and how they also do not have time for much else during that session. However, mentors' responses always came back to focus on the rewarding nature of their work or how they enjoyed getting to know a new group of students during that part of the year.

For mentors, the academic confidence that students develop in the summer program is counted among its positive outcomes. Simon Rivera talked about the academic confidence he sees students develop, saying it "creates a sense of pride in them, like whoa, we were able to do this when we didn't think we were." This idea of challenging students to let them see that they can achieve is an intentional strategy of the program. Director Lauren described:

I think the probably single greatest thing we're able to provide in this program is the opportunity for students to rise to a challenge and actually see what they're capable of doing if they stretch themselves in ways they haven't done before.

The summer program itself is filled with a minefield of potential hurdles and barriers to success, including short timelines, potential under-preparedness of students, obligations from family, work or other non-curricular factors that may impede a student's ability to focus; the mentors acknowledge those challenges and encourage students to see and use the resources which can help them work around those hurdles. Then, they celebrate the student's achievement, reminding them of what they did to meet the posed academic challenges in front of them. Little information was offered on what happens if or when students still cannot work around the hurdles to achieve success in the summer program, even with the support offered. However, this seems to be a rare case, as Lauren reported that there was just one student in many years who was not able to

complete the summer program for unspecified reasons; that student still enrolled at the University as a full-time student in the following fall semester.

Winston Parker described the intensity of the summer program helping him to feel more confident as, “them like pushing me to step out of my comfort zone. You can’t grow unless you step out of your comfort zone, they always tell me.” Meeting the academic challenges posed by the summer program certainly requires students to step out of their comfort zone. Intentionally, it also requires them to learn to rely on the advice and support of the resources around them, and on their own abilities. The academic challenge of the summer program, as guided by mentors who help students see both the difficulties and the benefits that such a challenge entails, allows program students to grow substantially in academic confidence and learn about college expectations before they officially begin their first full-time college semester.

Campus Resources

The structure of the 6-week summer program requires students to seek exposure to a variety of campus resources, such as counseling services, the Career Center, the Writing Center, etc. In doing so, they are prompted to interact with institutional agents on a regular basis and establish connections that often last well beyond the summer program. This required exposure comes from two sources: 1) the planned events and activities that are a part of the weekly program schedule, and 2) a set of academic challenges created by the rigor of the program that almost forces students to rely on the resources around them to aid their success.

The scheduled programs require students to connect with campus resources in different ways. In the summer of 2016, students had a required session with the library each week, where they would be given tutorials on conducting research and navigating a college library. Students are also required to connect with technology resources as part of their program schedule,

checking in their institution-issued laptops, and using resources like Blackboard and Compass to schedule meetings and complete assignments during the summer session. Program students are required to attend a Writing Center orientation and regular, individual tutoring sessions with a Writing Center tutor throughout the 6-week program. Additionally, other campus resources – such as Counseling and Psychological Services and the Career Center – are scheduled to host informational workshops with students; these resources are brought into their academic courses at some point during the summer for an introduction and review of services. Rivera mentioned a scavenger hunt that students do in the beginning of the summer program, in which they are asked to find different resources on campus and note where they are located and what services they provide. In this way, the knowledge about access to campus resources is, as Richardson described it, “built-in.” Participating in the required sessions of the summer program allowed students to get familiar with many of the campus resources, and come away with a knowledge of what’s available to them.

However, students and mentors explained that program students’ interaction with campus resources goes beyond simple exposure and general knowledge. During the summer program, the scheduled events and activities may help students gain exposure to resources, but the academically rigorous climate of the program cements the resources’ significance in the students’ experiences. When Bishop was asked about how he thinks program students develop an awareness of both program and institution resources, he responded, “well, we make them [students] depend on the resources.” When faced with an academic challenge in the summer program, students learn to rely on the support that the program has built around them. If a student is struggling in a Math class, he quickly learns that a tutor can sit down with him daily to review problems and answer questions. If a student is feeling overwhelmed and overly stressed

by family issues she is experiencing outside the classroom, she realized that there is an office on campus that offers counseling to students, and that it can easily become an important part of her regular routine. Arman said, of the use of campus resources over the summer:

It was a great way for me to just really know that I could either go to the writing center, whether it be for an essay, or that I could go to tutoring. And that I always have people to count on and that I can look up to if I need any help at all.

The program creates an intense environment in which students need the resources around them, and then are able to see how helpful those resources can be. They leave the summer program feeling an allegiance to those resources, and knowing that using them can help to achieve their goals – just as they did in the summer program.

The program students interviewed for this study were well-versed in a plethora of campus resources. When asked how the institution might help students to succeed academically at the university – if it does help at all – most students rattled off a list of tutoring options, Counseling and Psychological Services, the dean of students' office, academic advisors, the Career Center. Moreover, students did not just know that these resources were available, but they also described what services the resources offered and how to use them. Many students discussed their own continued use of resources long after the summer program ended. However, even though the students were well-informed about the myriad campus resources available to them, many students reported using mostly program-specific resources, opting for the tutoring provided by Program A throughout the year rather than tutoring provided by the University. Many students also said they went to study hours and academic skills events led by the program. Again, students were aware of those types of resources offered by the University, but chose to use the program offerings. Hernandez said that after going to Program A's tutoring center regularly over the summer term, she continued to do so during the fall semester because she was comfortable going

there: “When the semester came I was just used to going to CLIA [Program A’s tutoring center].” Parker also emphasized his comfort level using Program A resources, saying that he knows they have other tutoring options and study areas around campus, but he still prefers to use those offered by the program. “It’s just something about the home environment in [Program A],” he explained.

This finding may indicate that the summer program creates patterns of behavior – students using program and – perhaps to a lesser degree – campus resources – that continue after the program ends. This outcome is especially important for at-risk, or specifically first-generation college students, since these students are often the most in need of supplemental resources, but the least likely to use them for various reasons (uncertainty navigating the system, lack of awareness that resources exist, work or family obligations conflicting with available time to use such resources, etc.). The structure of the summer program creates the initial exposure to these resources, and the academic challenge reinforces their importance for students.

Student-Faculty Relationships

The structure of the summer program supports potential mentoring relationships in the way that it requires students and faculty to spend long periods of time working together in a few different capacities. Students learn to depend on their summer program faculty members and develop a bond with them, which they describe as unique to the summer program. Students spend at least 10 – 15 hours per week with faculty members, depending on the amount of supplementary faculty tutoring sessions they are required to attend throughout the summer. This allows students to establish close relationships with faculty members in a short period of time, which is especially important for students who struggle with a feeling of marginalization. These student-faculty relationships are important to students; they feel more comfortable interacting

with faculty in general as they head into their first full-time semester as college students, and they feel as if they have faculty members as their allies who are connected to the program, but separate from it as well, since faculty members do not report directly to the program and teach outside of the program for the fall and spring semesters. The faculty members they work with over the summer become a bridge from the comforts of the summer program into the often intimidating world of collegiate classes and student-faculty interactions that they enter into in the fall semester.

Several student participants mentioned the bond between program students and their faculty members. Parker commented that he sees his summer program professors more frequently than other instructors, and described his relationship with them as especially close: “I feel more comfortable around them than I would like any one of my other professors or even my other [non-program] advisor.” When asked what generated this comfort level, Parker attributed it to the amount of time they spent together over the summer and the nature of that time they spent working together. “Over the summer I had to rely on them a lot, more than any other one of my professors,” he explained. Arman re-iterated this feeling, discussing the bond established with her summer faculty members by the amount of time they spent together and how that allowed them to get to know each other well. Arman said, “for a fact I know that like if I were to have trouble with like anything, I could always go to them and ask them for any help.”

Both Parker and Arman’s comments make it clear that the summer faculty members played an important role in their academic lives both during and after the summer program ended. It is the structure of the summer program which creates the long hours spent together in small classes or in individual tutoring that allows for the creation of long-term bonds between students and faculty members. Students spend more time with faculty members in their summer

program classes and in the supplementary tutoring sessions than they most likely will with any other faculty members in the rest of their college careers. That trust established provides the foundation for building a mentoring relationship. The faculty members are committed to supporting the students, even when they are not required by job duty to do so.

During the summer program, students learn important behaviors that create opportunities for them to extend their faculty network in the fall and spring semesters. Students have mandatory meetings with program faculty to discuss their students' progress in the summer courses, and program faculty regularly ask students to visit office hours just to check in throughout the summer. This structure gets students in the habit of not only checking in to see how they are doing in their classes, but also keeping in regularly contact with their faculty members. Perry says this requirement helps students "get used to it," with "it" in this case being out of class interactions with faculty. For first generation or at-risk students who may be intimidated by college professors, this can alleviate a lot of the fear factor involved in attending office hours or talking to faculty. In her interview, Morales talked about feeling more confident asking her professors questions in class, which has been found to be an indicator of academic confidence in previous literature (Sander & Sanders, 2006). When asked what she thought made her feel more confident, she credited her experience of spending more time with professors. She said, "They're not so scary if you just try talking to them." Interacting with their professors inside and outside the classroom seems to be an important way for students to establish valuable connections with faculty; it is also an important indicator of engagement, according to NSSE (NSSE Engagement Indicators, 2018). The structure of the summer program is designed to facilitate these connections.

If students leave the summer program feeling more confident and comfortable approaching faculty members and interacting with them, they are more likely to continue to do the same thing as they continue their studies. Establishing the regular habit of visiting office hours over the summer enables students to make new connections with faculty members once they are full-time college students. In this way, the structure of the summer program creates these opportunities for students both during the summer and after the program has concluded. Opportunities for student-faculty interactions outside of class are important for at-risk students since these interactions are an indicator of engagement, according to the NSSE (NSSE Engagement Indicators, 2018).

While the result of increased student-faculty bonds over the summer is mostly positive for students, there is one down side that students discussed. As the support they receive from program faculty over the summer is acknowledged as uniquely attentive, students often expect the same high levels of involvement from faculty in the fall and spring semesters. However, the summer program runs in its own environment, separate from the fall and spring semesters at the University; further, program faculty are carefully selected by the program director and staff for their ability to respond to program students' specific needs. The kind of support offered by program faculty in the summer program is not always available to students in the fall and spring semesters with the general population of faculty members at the University. Michaels described one professor he has, who is an adjunct faculty member and does not hold office hours, despite the University policy requiring adjunct faculty members to hold at least one office hour per three credit course. "I wasn't sure if that was even a thing that could happen," he described. Michaels tried to get more time in with this professor by talking with him before or after class, but found this to be impossible: "he tends not to stay too much longer after class ends. And unfortunately I

have a class immediately before it...So any questions I do have unfortunately I can't really have answered." In this case, one strategy he learned during the summer program – relying on steadfast support from faculty members with the time to meet with him – could not carry over into the full-time semester.

The availability and supportiveness of non-program faculty members certainly lies beyond the control of the summer program itself. However, the program does offer students a structure which gives them a substantive amount of time working with faculty members in the summer and establishing a trust between them which extends beyond the program. While this creates expectations which are potentially unrealistic in later student-faculty relationships, it does at least address student intimidation by college professors by compelling students to interact with faculty members frequently both inside and outside the classroom. It also establishes behaviors that promote future relationships between students and faculty members outside of the summer program, and thusly, campus engagement.

The Family Atmosphere

The structure of the summer program allows the formation of a bond among the students and between students and program staff/faculty that all parties involved describe as family. Students are spending time with program staff in residence halls, at team-building events both on and off-campus, at career workshops, at ice cream socials. The time spent together as structured by the program is both sizeable and oriented in both academic and social spheres. Both students and mentors describe students looking out for one another, and developing connections with each other and with program staff which begin during the 6-week summer program, but last long after it concludes. Students and mentors comment that this atmosphere is especially valuable to bridge program students who are missing family support in their own lives.

The word “family” was used consistently through student and mentor interviews to describe the relationships established among and between students and program staff. The term “family” was used to describe both specific situations and the broader program as a whole. Parker said of his advisors from the summer program, “I feel like they have become my family,” while Ramirez explained that when facing challenges, she especially feels a kinship amongst her peers in the program, with whom she’s had the bonding experience of the summer. “So we get to share [challenges] with them,” she said, “and we get to share our failures and successes with them [peers].” Michaels articulated this feeling about a more specific relationship, when he discussed his mentor, who “became, in a sense, a father figure.” He explained, “I can go in there and talk about anything.” The extensive time students spend with each other and with program staff during the summer program connects them, and the support that extends beyond the summer reinforces those relationships. When the summer program is over and students see that program staff still care about how they are doing, still host events that allow students to get together with each other and with staff in both formal and informal ways (e.g. monthly community meetings, student organization events, volunteering opportunities), students continue to feel connected to the program – and continue to develop potential mentoring relationships. As Daniela Martin described, “it’s like a family,” and talking to a program staff member is “like talking to one of your uncles or aunts.”

This connection is important for students who often feel an instability in their personal lives. Mentors talked about the family feel of the program providing basic needs for students in areas in which they were lacking, such as the security of a stable home or the guidance of a parent who is consistently able to provide emotional support. Bishop said:

There’s this hierarchy of needs. [Program A] really meets that need with its family approach. [It’s almost like] you probably don’t have a family, but you have a family

now...and you can see [the building that houses the Program A staff] and you know [Program A]’s there, then you know everybody in there, and they wanna know how you’re doing. You have to meet that need first, before you can even get them to want to succeed.

The summer program attempts to meet this need in part by requiring students and potential mentors to interact with each other in ways that go beyond that of typical advisement meetings (e.g. registration, course progress). Extending beyond the bounds of an advising relationship and into mentorship territory as a standard practice makes students feel more secure in the ways that they can rely on program staff. The program creates a protected space for students in this way, and such trust-building is intentional, according to Director Lauren:

Our students are poor. [They] have established historical poverty. The goal is to change that so that our students’ children aren’t poor and don’t qualify for [Program A] and programs like these...And in that, to try to create that buy-in with students, to build that understanding, and to know that this is *their home away from home*, and that they should feel safe here. That’s reinforced through our openness, through our accessibility through our responsiveness.

It seems clear from students’ interviews that they do see the program as a home away from home and as a family. The activities and bonding time provided by the program’s structure certainly allows for students to adopt this mentality, but as Lauren noted, the mentality of the mentors also influence the way that students respond to the actual structure. An approach using “openness,” “accessibility,” and “responsiveness” is one that the mentors take very seriously in their roles within the program family. Both students and mentors discussed the accessibility and responsiveness of the mentors; students commented on how reliable their mentors were in being available for support and responsive to their communications, while mentors talked about how important it was that students were aware of their accessibility and responsiveness.

Indeed, the family feeling is certainly encouraged and adopted by the mentors themselves, several of whom described their students and other program staff as their second family. Jones described her job as an SDS by saying,

It's leaving your family at home and coming to another family...because you know everything that's going on with each and every student that you're working with to the point where the job sometimes isn't 9 to 5. It's all the time.

Mentors described the different personalities of program staff filling different roles in the program family. Several of the mentors described the “special” nature of their jobs, or of the people who are able to work successfully with program students. They talked about the considerable investment of time and energy that being part of the program family requires, and how important it is that they genuinely care for students and their problems. Students respond to that sincerity, as expressed by their beliefs that the members of their program family – the mentors and their fellow students – truly care for them and want them to succeed.

Students also discussed the way that the family atmosphere of the program brought them closer together as a cohort, and helps to motivate them to move forward as college students. The amount of time students spend together as they maneuver through the challenges of the summer program holds them together; it allows them to realize that they are not alone in feeling intimidated or marginalized on a college campus. Since almost all program students are first-generation students, minority students and/or low-income students, it can be easy for them to feel marginalized on a college campus, where most of their fellow students are likely faced with different, and often less severe, challenges. Martin explained that when she first got to campus in the summer for freshman orientation (before the summer program began), “I felt intimidated. I felt like I didn't belong here. And especially as a business student, you're just completely surrounded by, like, affluent white students.” However, by the end of the program, she said she

felt like she had “a whole family to back me up” when she feels like an outsider. Previous literature shows that establishing a sense of belonging in this way is an important factor in an at-risk student’s likelihood to persist in college. Feeling connected to a community of students can help students to engage with the campus and increase their chances of progression.

Several students described the formal and informal activities that allowed them to learn more about their program classmates and to find commonalities in the hardships they have endured. Martin described an activity in the beginning of the summer where students were asked to walk across a line if they experienced something a moderator would call out, like having the lights turned off in your home because of an inability to pay the electricity bill, or having books available to you while you were growing up. This particular activity was also mentioned by another student; both reported that it took courage to walk across the line at times, and that they were surprised and yet relieved to discover that some of their classmates were coming from similar circumstances. Zoe described having follow-up conversations about some of these activities in the residence halls during the summer. She reflected on the motivation she felt, explaining that if her classmates could overcome the kinds of challenges they shared with her, then she could do the same. “Seeing all these amazing people around me,” she said, “I’m like, this is so cool.” The program’s many activities and team-building opportunities allow students to share personal hardships with one another. This then leads them to feel more confident in themselves, recognizing the same achievements in their classmates. They feel a sense of community as a result of the shared experiences and motivated by the peer quality they find in each other; in this way, those experiences then become sources of strength and achievement for students, instead of potential obstacles.

After the summer program is over, this peer motivation continues into the fall and spring semesters, often in a more day-to-day sense. Several students mentioned the influence of connecting with older program students, who had been through the summer program before them and were willing to offer advice and support based on their own experiences. In addition to its peer mentoring options, the program connects students of different class years through a student organization exclusive to Program A students, monthly Program A community meetings, volunteer activities, and various programming throughout the academic year. In this way, students expand their network of program students beyond their own cohort, and many students interviewed expressed the benefits of this network. “They just motivate me,” Zoe explained, describing a situation where she felt tired and told her peers that she wanted to skip class, “they’ll be like get a coffee, and go to class (laughs).”

This peer motivation is certainly perpetuated, if not initially generated by the program staff in the summer. Rivera talked about the “60 in, 60 out mentality” that program staff discuss with students, in which they envision themselves as a team, as a family, responsible for looking out for each other’s best interests – one of which is to stay enrolled to finish the program, and eventually a degree. Rivera explained that they tell students, “we want all of you to encourage each other, because this is your group, this is your family – and we say that from Day One...everything we do over the summer is about that community and about that family.” Students take that obligation very seriously; they talk about seeing their classmates on campus long after the summer program ends, and feeling a kinship with their program classmates, even if they no longer interact on a daily basis.

Part of being in the program then, is connecting with other program students and doing what you can to help them succeed in college. This mentality involves more than just a pep talk

or some tutoring advice for younger students. Perry talked about one of the ways in which program staff discover what might be going on with their students, and how they are sometimes able to address issues before students come forward with their issues themselves. “I also go by feedback from other students,” he explained, “students are concerned about each other, and students will let me know what’s going on.” So essentially, more than just lending a hand to a peer they see struggling, program students will report their classmates’ difficulties to program staff, and help is called in for them. Perry stated that this is a regular occurrence; students share concerns about each other, especially if they feel their peers are not seeking the help that they need. Then, program staff will communicate with each other to discuss the best approach and bring the student in to discuss the problem. Students’ reactions vary in response to program staff’s awareness of their issues; Perry said some students are relieved, while others are sometimes unhappy that program staff have heard about a student’s issue or problem. However, Perry indicated that the confrontations themselves do not seem to be unexpected, remarking that students expect that they will reach out for help for their classmates if it appears necessary.

The family-like bonds formed during the summer program results in a network of student issue-sharing; this network creates advisors – and potential mentors – who are extremely well-informed about students’ lives and individual challenges. Without this network of information sharing, a student might approach his SDS with a problem after it is too late to address it, or perhaps never at all, thinking that he will be able to handle it on his own. With the benefit of this information sharing, program staff can prioritize students with the most urgent problems; they can also try to eliminate the student’s potential anxiety about sharing a problem with them. Sometimes it may be difficult for a student to ask for help, and if the SDS already knows the

situation, she can gently and appropriately guide the conversation toward the issue, hopefully creating an atmosphere in which the student feels comfortable sharing.

This close-knit family atmosphere has the potential consequence of isolation for students and mentors within the program. Students learn to rely so heavily on program staff and peers that they may see the rest of campus, outside the program as extraneous to their needs. The close-knit community creates important connections and networks for students within the program, but it has the potential to create an insular community; that comfortable space created by the family atmosphere could have the adverse effect of preventing students from making external connections outside the program. While students did not discuss this in their interviews, it seems like it could be a potential consequence of the family atmosphere of Program A; more research is needed to investigate this potential finding.

While the family atmosphere created by the program could be dismissed by outsiders as simply a few key words tossed around that create ‘warm and fuzzy’ feelings in their students, it actually serves a very real and significant function in the way that program staff are able to connect with and support their students. Through the structure of the summer program, students learn to feel secure in a supportive campus environment (an indicator of engagement, according to the NSSE, 2018); they also learn to trust and depend upon one another and the program staff, who are very equipped to address student needs in specific ways. Further, the buy-in of the program staff, the many activities that allow students to learn about one another, and the consistent call for students to support their peers, creates this ‘family feel’ of the program and the information sharing it encourages among staff and students. The program’s delivery of these messages through purposeful activities and talking points, as well as the program staff’s adoption of the family mentality themselves, make the family atmosphere something that students take

very seriously and accept as a great advantage. As Martin put it, “when you have people who are like-minded, people who are going to motivate you to be your best, it’s gonna stick with you. So...that kind of mentality has stuck with me, even a year afterwards.”

II: Mentoring Relationships

Individualized, Adapted Approach

Mentors see their time with their students as personal and paramount. For mentors, it is important to get to know program students well and respond to their individual needs; it is crucial that students know that mentors’ time with them is important and reserved solely for the student. Students feel valued as a result of this approach. Further, program staff begin recording student needs as soon as the students’ first interaction with the program: their admission interviews. Admission interviews for Program A are approximately three hours long; applicants speak with both program staff and counselors from the University, and are asked to produce a writing sample during their interview session. Applicants are asked about what made them successful high school students, how things are for them at home, what non-academic responsibilities they have in their household, why they are applying to the program, and why they are motivated to pursue a college degree. These discussions with students at the interview stage provide mentors with information about students’ needs at the very start of the program. Student needs might include anything from remedial math preparation, social media etiquette, collegial communication, making connections with new people, building confidence or presentation skills. Mentors note that just as each student arrives to campus with a unique set of needs, so does each cohort. The program responds to those needs by crafting summer workshop, class and activity curricula accordingly to address those needs. This crafted, intentional approach

affects the way that students and mentors relate to one another; the connection feels more personal and significant for students, and mentoring relationships formed with this approach seem to grow deeper and more secure faster than they might have otherwise.

The individualized, adaptive approach to working with at-risk students begins long before the summer program holds its first class. Several mentors discussed the interviews the program holds with student applicants, and the way that the interviewers take copious notes even during the process on what needs the student may have coming into the program. Moreover, at this point, the program staff begins to think about patterns that they see in the cohort, and what particular needs most urgently need to be addressed through the summer program. Jones explained how this works:

We try to better understand the groups that we're working with. We don't just create curriculums, we don't create programs blindly....even from the interview phase, we are very intentional when we interact with the students to better understand who they are...And as a result of understanding the population that's coming in, what their needs are going to be, we think of general areas that we need to develop to further assist them, even from topics like helping them build trust.

In this way, the program changes every summer. The courses offered, the workshops, off-campus excursions, social activities, the team-building exercises are all built around what the program staff learns about the cohort of students coming into the program. While one group of students may need a lot of support in basic academic skills, such as note-taking for example, the next may be more in need of communication skills, such as how to write a professional email, while the next may benefit most from workshops on building confidence. This approach seems to follow Witham & Bensimon's (2012) theory of "double-loop learning," since the program is investigating the values and underlying issues that may affect student success, and addressing those values and issues in response to unique student and cohort needs.

It is important for mentors to shed expectations and impressions of summer program students left over from a previous cohort. For the mentors who have worked with the program for many years, this adaptive approach can sometimes be challenging. “Each summer, I do have to look in the mirror and say, James, this is a different group of students,” Perry said. For a program that has been running for decades and boasts consistent levels of success in GPA, retention, and graduation rates, it might be easy to allow the program to run as it always has, without particular modification from year to year. However, the program’s leaders ensure that complacency does not affect their adaptive approach by coaching themselves in much the same way that they coach their students: hosting workshops for one another based on the needs that present themselves for each year. Perry further commented about instituting a workshop for program staff entitled “Vision Blindness,” in which the objective was to remind themselves that their “vision” for each group of students needs to adjust with the group. As Perry explained,

Just because it was productive for the group of students last year or two years ago doesn’t necessarily mean it’s gonna be productive for these students. So it’s always important for us to recognize our vision, but also to recognize what it is that this incoming class of students need compared to what last year’s students needed.

This workshop took place in the spring semester in preparation for the upcoming summer program. It is clear from mentor interviews that adjustments are made throughout the academic year to address program students’ needs. Rivera described being responsive to a particular need he and other program staff have observed in program students:

I think a lot of our students have been really impacted by some of the political changes that have been made, and the racial climate, and just like, all of it. And it’s becoming very apparent, and very overt, and I think we’ve come to a place now, where it’s like if we’re gonna talk about it, we need to teach you how to talk about it.

As a result, program staff have incorporated questions and lessons into their advising to help students address political or racial issues that may arise with classmates, professors, friends and others. Several mentors gave examples of coaching students through encounters with faculty or classmates that had to do with racial or social class induced tension. While this particular need may not have been directly addressed by programming in this cohort's summer schedule, it is something that is now incorporated into the way that program students are mentored.

Using this adaptive approach to counsel students makes them feel like their mentors not only care about their individual needs, but are also aware of the pressures and challenges they face each day. By continuing to be perceptive of students as individuals and as a group, and by keeping themselves informed of common issues that their students will have to navigate, mentors are seen by their students as caring, knowledgeable and capable. These mentors are not out of touch elders who do not understand what it's like to be an 18 year-old college student from a low-income background. They are savvy and receptive to students' needs, aware of trends and able to help students respond accordingly.

Another way that students are offered individualized support through the bridge program includes the contracts made with each student. At the beginning of the summer session, and then at the start of each subsequent full-time semester, each student sits down with his or her SDS to design a contract for the term ahead. Numerous factors contribute to this contract process, including the student's GPA, the student's need or desire for tutoring, the student's goals and the SDS's perception of the student's potential challenges for the term. Several students mentioned their contracts when asked about their interactions with program staff and about their program experiences in general. The contract serves as a check-point between the student and the program throughout the semester: the student begins the semester knowing exactly what the program

expects of him or her, and the program staff have concrete goals and behaviors on which to evaluate students' progress. While there is a template that mentors reference, each contract is individualized to the student being counseled. Jones said the contracts are sometimes a good excuse to check in with students throughout the semester, especially if they haven't heard from a student, or if it's a student who might otherwise fall off the radar. "I think students truly appreciate that," she elaborated, "because it helps them to feel a sense of belonging here...And also, they know we care."

Students confirmed that they felt cared for, with many of them smiling or playfully rolling their eyes as they talked about being under the close watch of their mentors. Williams called it "tough love," saying that, "if they notice that you're slacking, they'll get on you," but that this intrusive approach is welcome. "I would rather you got on me and told me I was doing something wrong so I can fix it than sit back and let me crash and burn," she concluded. Indeed, as Jones mentioned, that close watch is seen as a genuine concern for the student's well-being, both academic and otherwise. Several students commented that they knew they could approach their mentors with any number of problems or issues, and the mentor would find a way to help; they described feeling secure knowing that the mentor genuinely cared for them.

In addition to the contracts, this feeling seems to come from the mentors' approaches to advising and counseling students. When mentors were asked about their philosophies for working with at-risk students, they stressed the importance of treating students as individuals, working with one student at a time, and really listening to students' thoughts and experiences without making assumptions or judgments. Romano said, "I always try to make sure my students feel like they're unique and I'm carving out this time for them because I want them here." That focus on students was repeated among several mentors, who talked about the value of their time

with their students, and making sure students know that their focus is all on the individual student during that time together. Rivera explained his process for scheduling student meetings from the beginning of the semester. He has a grid in which he blocks off dates and times for each student for the entire term. This way, the student knows that they have time reserved with him, and the effort of scheduling regular meetings has already been made. Rivera notes that students can schedule additional meetings as often as they'd like, but their reserved time is sacred:

I make sure every student is aware that if I have another student who comes in during our session, if we're scheduled, you take a priority. For at least a half hour a month, you are a priority. And if you don't feel that in the rest of your life, recognize that in my office, for a half hour a month at least, that's there.

Beyond just the time reserved for each individual student, there is undivided attention to using that time to understand each student's background, challenges and thinking, and to make students feel valued. Lauren noted that he stresses to anyone who works with program students to remember that each student deserves full attention and time when working with them. Rivera echoed this philosophy when he described his office:

When you set foot inside my office, this is your space. That if you don't feel like you belong, if you feel like there aren't any other people who are like you....I may not understand you but I'm gonna make the effort to. You are at the center of it all.

He then pointed out that his walls are loaded with materials from students: posters that students have made, gifts students have given him, projects and papers that his students have produced. This is intentional and serves a purpose in making his students feel connected to him and to his office:

I take great pride in the fact that this is not just my space. This is our space, and you should feel comfortable to be who you are, and to do – to express the vulnerability that you have and the challenges that you have here. If you feel like you can't do that anywhere else, at least here you have a home.

Other mentors' offices also featured student work, cards and material. Perry discussed an item hanging on his wall, a print-out from a student project. He has students design a Powerpoint presentation during the summer program in which the student develops a movie about his or her life in college and goals for after college; he asks students to include some of the great things they will accomplish as college students and beyond. Then what? "I keep them," he explained, following up with students throughout their college careers asking about their original goals, what has changed, what might be preventing them from achieving what they wanted to, etc. By using this strategy, Perry is focusing on the individual student's thoughts, goals and beliefs, and the ways those things may evolve as the student grows and develops through the course of college.

Beyond ensuring that students feel represented and included in the spaces where they meet with their mentors, mentors talk also about the importance of individualizing their support for students. This approach is based in the requirement that mentors know their students very well. When asked how he knows when a student is struggling, Lauren said, "You have to know your students. I think we have to observe them over time...there's no one way of what it looks like." He explained that then, once a mentor knows a student very well, it becomes easy to see when something is "off" with the student. Romano seems to take the same approach, explaining that before she gives advice, she asks a lot of questions. "I can give recommendations," she said, "but until I really know how a student is doing or what they're actually here for," she reserves her advice. This approach gives the student time to express specifically how he or she is feeling and what circumstances may be surrounding the challenge presented to the mentor. For example, if a student came to Romano's office because she was failing a course, the standard advice might be to meet with the professor, seek tutoring, and make a study plan. While this is good advice for

all students, taking the time to understand the student's approach to the class, what the student attributes to his failing grade, the way the student perceives those standard recommendations, and many other factors will help Romano give more specific advice. If the advice is tailored to the student's needs, the student is more likely to follow through on those recommendations and seek additional help from her mentor if she still needs assistance.

Bishop echoed the importance of working to understand individual student needs: "It has to be one student at a time," he said, "we can set up all this wonderful programming, but if there's no personal touch, no personal understanding of what the student's story is...you've lost them." He went on to remark on the effect the approach has on students, saying that the effort to work with "one student at a time, one moment at a time," is appreciated. "They [students] take it very personally," Bishop explained. Students, in turn, confirmed this idea of taking it personally. Students' comments about their mentors made it clear that they felt valued, they noticed and appreciated the individualized approach, and they were often impressed by the support their mentors were able to offer.

Lopez said of her mentor, "he's so dedicated to his students," while Ramirez, Anderson and Morales all commented that they felt like they could always go to their mentors for help no matter what the issue was. Ramirez went on to comment about program staff: "they knew us individually. They didn't compare us to other students." Students express these feelings about their mentors simply and in a straight-forward manner: they trust their mentors and the program staff. While they have all faced challenges, and acknowledged that no one and nothing is perfect, all students are assured of their mentors' desire and ability to help students. This confidence and trust seems to come from the individual attention students get from their mentors, the support that is focused on each student's own challenges, perceptions and experiences, and not on

standardized academic advice. It seemed more important to students that their mentors knew them (the students) well, rather than that they knew the intricacies of study strategies. The efforts and philosophies that mentors describe in making students feel valued, of taking efforts to identify and understand needs and concerns before students even begin the program, let alone ask for help, lead to students' general impression that their mentors care about students, and are capable of understanding and addressing students' unique needs. "I don't know how they do it," Ramirez said, "but they always find a solution. They also, like genuinely want the best for you."

Holistic Approach

Taking a holistic approach to advising bridge program students means that mentors recognize the myriad influences on these students' lives that could affect their chances at success in college. Mentors describe working with students on more than just their academic plans and skills; they stress the importance of recognizing the many factors that influence an at-risk student's chance at success in college (e.g. financial stress, family responsibilities, unstable relationships with parents or guardians, lack of confidence, etc.). Additionally, mentors describe working with bridge program students as an effort that not only goes beyond typical academic advice, but also beyond typical work hours or obligations. Mentors see the importance of their own roles in addressing these factors to give students the best chance at persisting in college.

When students were asked about the bridge program itself, every one of them mentioned the direct financial assistance (in the form of a state-subsidized grant) that Program A provides. While students did not talk much about this aspect of the program in the rest of their interviews, they clearly associated the program with the financial security it provided them. Director Lauren explained that it was not something they stress to students as a reason for participating in the program, but giving financial assistance was something they widely acknowledge as necessary

for any of these students to even think about attending a private, 4-year institution as an option. This is one example of the ways in which the program and students' mentors provide holistic support for students. Of course, as Lauren noted, the emphasis of the program is academic success, and the end goals for students are all academically motivated. However, recognizing that the students in the program juggle academics with a number of other priorities which require their time, energy and funds, the program and its staff must account for those competing factors in the way they offer students support. Mentors must offer holistic support for at-risk students because at-risk students have many other demands on their time and attention besides their academic work.

Students describe their relationships with their mentors as different from their relationships with other advisors, faculty members or administrators around campus. Ramirez described her mentor as her instructor, "but also, kind of like a friend if you think about it...she incorporated like other aspects of her life, our life [into her class]. She was interested in a lot of aspects of ourselves, not just the class." Michaels also talked about taking life lessons away from his summer English course, reflecting that while developing their writing skills, the instructor led them in discussion topics that went beyond the course material. Similarly, Morales spoke about "family-related stuff" in her EXAC Success Skills summer seminar, and Lopez noted the career advice she was offered by her mentor. Several students talked about getting help with financial aid forms, such as the FAFSA, and having program staff explain the process to parents as well. Anderson said of the institution as a whole, "they offer services that help emotionally, 'cause school's not just academics. There's a lot of factors." Clearly students are seeking support for many aspects of their lives beyond curricular obligations.

Mentors expressed satisfaction with this holistic aspect of their roles, which allowed them to support students and relate to them from a number of different angles. Rivera explained that before he arrived to his current role, he was looking for something that was holistic in nature, and several mentors talked about how supporting students in this holistic way often went beyond the standard advisor or instructor job description. For many of the mentors, supporting students in a multi-faceted way means an intrusive advising approach, in which advisors purposefully intervene at the first sign of a student's academic struggle (Earl, 1988). Using this approach helps students who are reluctant to ask for help, and in previous literature, intrusive advising has been shown to have positive effects on student retention (Earl, 1988). For the mentors in this study, holistic and intrusive advising go hand in hand: they intervene sometimes even before there is a sign of trouble, and make efforts to be part of students' lives in non-academic ways so that they have more opportunities to recognize and act on those initial indications of difficulty. Mentors did not leave campus until long after their regular work hours to stay connected to students in several different ways: Rivera, for example, advises the Latino/a student group on campus, while Bishop advises multiple groups, one called GOLD, or Gentlemen of Leadership and Distinction, and another called BMS, or Black Men of Standard. Both GOLD and BMS aim to address the specific needs and challenges of the male population on campus; both groups have a high contingency of Program A students. In interviews, students talked about connecting with their mentors and other program staff through these organizations; after learning about the organizations at an involvement fair held during the summer program, students were encouraged to join by the program staff and felt more comfortable doing so, since they already knew the advisors. Additionally, mentors seek out students on campus on a regular basis for multiple reasons: maybe a student has missed a scheduled meeting, so the mentor will show up at the

student's class the next day to check in. Or perhaps the mentor receives notice that a student is not performing in one of her classes and the student has not been receptive to the mentor's emails or calls; that student may get a knock on the door of her residence hall from a mentor who is worried about her. Further still, mentors discussed making regular walks around campus just to be visible to students, to give students the opportunity to say hello and ask for support, to let students know that they see them going to class. That visibility is an integral part of the holistic support they offer to students.

The holistic approach extends to individual counseling sessions with students. Several mentors talked about moving "beyond fine" in their discussions with students, in the sense that they do not accept "fine" as an answer. On a broader scale, this means that mentors pay attention to the details of their interactions with students, and do not dismiss those details as irrelevant. They do not accept surface level interactions, and students notice that attention. Romano said her conversations with students usually starts with the simple question of "how are you doing?" but when she gets that single-word answer of "fine," she keeps asking. "I'll ask it a bunch of different ways," she said:

How are your faculty this semester? How do you feel like you're doing? What are you doing outside of classes? And I'll loop back and be like how are you feeling right now? And that catches them off-guard. A lot. And so then we'll start to get into, well okay I'm really stressed about X, or what have you.

Perry and Rivera also discussed not accepting fine – or any "generic" answer – as a response for how a student is really doing. Perry gave an example of a student he worked with who would not look anyone in the eye, so most of their initial conversations involved Perry saying to the student, "Look at me. Look at me. Look at me," until, as Perry described, "he got tired of me saying that" and the student changed his body language.

Along these lines, mentors discussed helping students with their emotional aptitude, and developing the social and communication skills necessary to succeed in college. Jones said, “our goal is to truly engage with these students to the point where you really help them to be the best versions of their selves. And in order to do that we have to get involved in every aspect of who they are.” So for mentors, that means asking students to consider their own values, their own goals and what brought them to college in the first place. Bishop explained that this process helps them to uncover and discuss with students some of the challenges that students face in terms of leaving home and separation anxiety from their home communities. This takes place in structured activities in the summer program, such as outdoor team-building activities, which may require students to climb a rope or perform a trust fall, and then discuss their feelings through that activity as well as their own definitions of fear, courage, and examples of both.

Conversations like these continue in one-on-one advising sessions where students are asked to examine their feelings and beliefs below surface level. Perry gave the example of a student expressing concern that a course is unfair or that a professor dislikes the student. Perry said, “I try to get students to understand how their thought process is basically controlled by how they feel, and how they feel is determined by some implicit thoughts that may not be accurate.” So the resulting conversation is not just a list of potential conflict-resolution strategies that the student could find in a quick internet search, but a real examination of the student’s approach to the situation, what values, thoughts, fears and beliefs the student is bringing into the seemingly simple conclusion that the professor is unfair. Thus, mentors are helping students to not just develop as students, but as persons and learners.

The holistic approach asks mentors and students to think more deeply about challenges and to address them alongside a process of self-examination. This approach is work-intensive,

with mentors describing long hours on campus and maximized efforts to reach students outside of the traditional appointment (e.g. campus organizations, visiting classes or residence halls). Bishop said of supporting students in this way, “12 times out of 10, [it’s] way beyond anything the job description can ask you to do.” Mentors remained positive about this demanding commitment to their students, but a few mentioned the time spent away from their families, social lives or even career development. “You’re too busy to think about your next career plans,” Bishop explained, because the year moves so quickly and mentors need to stay ahead of each term, thinking about potential programming and keeping a close watch on their students. However, mentors also talked about the rewarding nature of this demanding schedule, expressing joy at seeing students progress and graduate, in part thanks to their efforts of support.

Mentors also discussed the importance of realizing the demand of non-campus factors on students’ lives. Lucas discussed the disadvantaged backgrounds from which students come, and the pressure students feel to fulfill family obligations before worrying about school. Bishop referred to program students as being “*parentified*,” or “*parentalized*” meaning that the students are often responsible for a lot of household duties that are traditionally left to parents. Instead, it is the students who might have to translate conversations between bill collectors and their parents, or the students who are responsible for transporting younger siblings to and from school. It may be that the students have to work to pay household bills, which may sometimes carry an extra responsibility: mentors talked about household bills being in the students’ name because the parents do not have social security numbers, or because parents just do not have the credit report required. Mentors see their own roles as helping students to navigate the two different worlds in which they live, between home and school. Rivera talked about students who are conflicted between wanting to be more involved on campus or needing to spend more time on

school work, but not being able to do so because of obligations at home. Students' parents, who often have not attended college themselves, sometimes do not understand these conflicts. Rivera believes his job is to help "students understand and navigate those conversations and the impact of those conversations, to prepare them for that impact, preparing students, like your parents might be pissed off at you, and you're gonna have to be okay with that (laughs)."

As might be expected, mentors report that these conversations and exercises are often a bit uncomfortable, because students must reconsider their values and, sometimes, their relationships. Perry and Rivera mentioned discussions they have had with students about maintaining connections with high school friends who either do not have the same value for education or do not support the student's desire to attain an education. Conversations like these ask students to think about difficult choices and push students out of their comfort zone. Students are regularly asked about the way that their values and their actions match up with their goals; there is a process of introspection that seems to be a regular part of the relationship between the mentor and program students.

The program's holistic approach also helps students to experience new things and learn new behaviors on a more concrete level. Jones talked about meeting with an alum who said she hated the summer program while she was in it, but was grateful for, among other things, the first time she got to see what a restaurant looked like as part of a required program outing. Jones did not remember exactly, but the needs of that program could have included exposure to common social situations that program students may not have experienced. "The reality is," Jones said, "most of the students have never been in a restaurant, let alone [know] how to dress [professionally]" and the program addresses those cultural gaps. While something like how to order food and eat at a restaurant, or how to dress for a college class may seem irrelevant as a

student struggles with a science course, the anxiety a student has over being unfamiliar with these experiences may easily affect the way a student interacts with the campus. The students who have never been to a restaurant, for example, may avoid social outings and thus miss out on making peer contacts. This diminished engagement eventually may lead to lower rates of academic success and retention. The program's approach to working with students holistically attempts to address these kinds of issues which may not be categorized under standard academic support. However, addressing these issues can increase the chances that a student will respond to the institution's efforts for support, become more engaged on campus and find pathways to success.

Developing Ownership

Mentors talk about empowering students to develop ownership over their own education and their own lives. The first step in this process seems to be helping students learn about themselves and develop a sense of self-authorship. Thus, mentors view helping students to think about and internalize their values, identities, goals, and biases as an integral part of their role as mentors. Ultimately, mentors teach students that the efforts to succeed have to be the student's own, and that students ultimately are the masters of their own destinies, in that their ability to affect their own outcomes is often greater than they realize. Mentors describe a successful bridge program student as one who, in many ways, exemplifies the element of self-authorship, which is described as "securing internal commitments" (Magolda, 2008, p. 277). The successful bridge program student is eventually able to examine his/her values, goals and identity while gaining more confidence in his/her ability to make decisions accordingly and take risks in order to achieve those goals.

Self-authorship refers to a student's ability to identify and determine his/her own identity, relationships and values (Magolda, 2008). A student demonstrates self-authorship when she no

longer accepts his/her own existing identity, relationships and values as they are defined by outside sources such as family, friends, societal pressures, and instead begins to create or re-create those entities for himself/herself from an internal process (Magolda, 2008). For mentors in this study, that process is part of a goal they have for their students: developing ownership and accountability for their own outcomes, both in education and in life in general. Several mentors talked about the beginning of this shift of ownership, helping students to realize that although a lot of their time and behavior during the summer program is proscribed and required by the program, all of the actions that they are taking, including just being part of the program, are up to them. Students must realize that although they are in a rigorous program which mandates certain behaviors, the choices to attend the program and follow through on the program's recommendations are ultimately up to them, and it is the students who will benefit or suffer from those choices. Perry discussed his intrusive approach to advising, in which he monitors student attendance, cell phone use during study hours, etc., but explained that students have free will in determining whether or not they will follow his advice:

I will not deny any student their right to fail. By that I mean, if you're in the class and you're not taking care of business, we try to make you take care of business, we get you tutoring and so forth and so on. But if you continue not to take care of business my thing is, it's time for you to go somewhere else.

Perry acknowledged this perspective may seem harsh, but giving students the opportunity to fail is a key component of helping them think about why they are in the program and why they are or are not following through on suggestions and advice from their mentors.

Mentors also discussed the importance of students taking ownership in more common circumstances of everyday student questions or concerns. Jones talked about students learning to solve their own problems by saying, "this is something they're gonna have to do, in the long

term have to do on their own... We show them how to do it first, and then we slowly give them that room to try to do it on their own.” This approach of mentoring from the sidelines to instill ownership was echoed by Lauren when he described the process of registration meetings. Students are expected to attend meetings with notes, questions and ideas prepared, and he asks his staff to begin the meeting by letting students present what they have brought in. While he and his staff have also prepared, they let the students navigate the meeting, just as they are navigating their own course in their education. Of course mentors can give students the necessary information, but the responsibility of gathering it and guiding the discussion is initially up to the student, and the mentor can re-focus or correct mistakes if necessary. In this fashion, students must believe that their course registration process is their own to navigate; it also sets a precedent for future meetings with mentors, in that students think about issues and concerns beforehand, and come in prepared to direct the conversation as benefits their needs. This approach allows students to “build agency” as Romano puts it, and learn to “advocate for themselves.”

In addition to offering sideline support, mentors discussed working with students on a process of guided introspection which helps students to learn about themselves. When asked about their conversations with students, several mentors discussed using guiding questions and topics which ask students to think about identity, goals and values on a regular basis. The focus of this learning process comes from introspection, and not external sources, and in this way, fits two elements of self-authorship (2008). Magolda (2008, pp. 274-275) cites “trusting the internal voice” and “building the internal foundation” as key aspects of students developing self-authorship. Trusting the internal voice has to do with a student getting to know himself/herself better and becoming more familiar with his/her true identity, including strengths and weaknesses; students who learn to trust their internal voice will be able to recognize what

motivation comes from within, and what external motivating factors are influencing their decision-making. Mentors' approach demonstrates this element of self-authorship in that they consistently ask students about their goals, their motivation and how each of those things are derived. Bishop described his discussions about motivation and identity with students:

Ya know, you want to do well, you're told to do well all throughout your life, so why is it all of a sudden, now it's supposed to work? You're tired of hearing this, so let's talk about who you are. Let's talk about what your name means. When you sign your name on a piece of paper, what does that mean? And why you should excel, so – our approach is really gets into a couple [of] layers that are deeper, like we want to get to the core of why it is that you do what you do.

Similarly, Rivera asks students to consider their own definitions of success, and not let outside forces dictate what they want or what they think they should be trying to achieve:

Whatever I consider good grades – it's about you. What is it that you want for *yourself*? What is it that you want to work towards? What is it, what is the life that you want to live, and how do you want to live it? And let's just have conversations about how to put you in a place where you can best do that.

The conversations are focused on helping students to think about identity and values on a consistent basis. They are prodded by their mentors to create their own definitions for success as well as a roadmap for achieving that success.

Building the internal foundation involves solidifying those values and goals internally by growing more confident in the self-knowledge and self-examination that has brought them to light (Magolda, 2008). This element of self-authorship involves students not just thinking about their own identity, but embracing it, and finding strength in it (Magolda, 2008). Mentors discussed conversations with students that help them to do this by asking them to evaluate their own self-worth and how it is affected by those around them. Perry mentioned asking students how they feel while they are in class and their classmates are talking; he asks students if they

tune their classmates out, and why. Romano asks students to think about things they seem passionate about, and try to figure out why that passion is not incorporated into their goals; she encourages them to deconstruct what outside influences may encourage them to discount that passion, and examine their own internal feelings about it. And Bishop discussed conversations about masculinity and femininity as a preceptor to formal programs on these topics, which help students feel more secure in their own perceptions of themselves. Further, although mentors are there to support students as they go through this process of introspection, students are still owners of their own development in self-authorship. The mentors' approach involves a lot of question-asking and thought-provoking conversations or reading material, but those techniques serve as merely a push toward the self-discovery students must do on their own. Mentors believe that in order to be successful, students must explore and create an internal motivation derived from their confidence in establishing a carefully thought-out system of values, goals and identity.

For mentors, a student success story is one in which the students have developed ownership over their education and career goals; it represents a process by which the student has examined and adapted her ideas about her own identity and capabilities, motivations and goals, and then feels confident in moving forward toward those new goals. This success story is similar to Magolda's (2008) third element of self-authorship, securing internal commitments, in which students become more confident in who they are, what they want from the world, and feel okay with taking risks in order to achieve their goals. Rivera described working with a student who changed his entire perspective of who he was and what he was able to accomplish in his life. The student's success, for Rivera, was being able to "see a future for himself that was very different than the future that he saw for himself when he started." Rivera continued that the student's ultimate success was to realize what the combination of his own potential and the opportunities

presented to him by the program and the institution could continue to offer him in both the short term and long term. Lauren also talked about the way in which a student's vision shifts when they begin to develop self-authorship, saying that when students start to think in this way, guided by their internal commitments: "the questions they ask you are different, the advice they seek is different, the guidance they require is different, and our conversations change accordingly. I think that's the success story."

Mentors guide students through the internal process of developing ownership because it plays such an important role in student development. While the summer program allows for mentors to keep a close watch on students and make sure they are adhering to the appropriate behaviors that foster student success, it is not possible to continue that schedule or level of monitoring once they become full-time college students, after the program ends. Nor would mentors want to do so, since their own motivation comes not from retention statistics or GPA averages, but from helping students grow as young adults and achieve their goals. Lauren said of students who have developed a sense of ownership, "their greatest disappointment will not be about disappointing someone else, but disappointing themselves," since they are no longer guided by the external influences which may steer them off-track, but by their own internal voice and framework of values, which has been fleshed out and made secure by – among other factors – support from their mentors.

Equity-mindedness and Student Motivation

In line with equity-minded practice, mentors generally reject the traditional student success paradigm, and believe that standardized test scores, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, family background, and other 'at-risk' categorizations do not determine a student's chance to succeed. Instead, it is the student's willingness to take advantage of the opportunities put in front of him, combined with the efforts of a committed team of mentors and campus resources creating

those opportunities, which determine a student's ability to succeed in college. Mentors also displayed equity-minded practice in their viewpoint that the student is not the only agent involved in his or her own success or failure (Bensimon, 2007). Instead, mentors see themselves and the institution as contributing active and important roles in their students' development and ability to succeed. Mentors are also aware of the unique challenges that Black, Latino/a and low-income students face in pursuing higher education, another viewpoint that is in line with equity-minded practice (Bensimon, 2007). That mentors operate with these beliefs becomes evident when they discuss their approach to working with program students. For mentors, having rejected the traditional paradigm of student success, they have adopted one in which students need motivation, resources and appropriate counseling from skilled practitioners in order to be successful. For students, working with mentors who are equity-minded manifests in motivation and confidence; it also leads to a student perspective which envisions opportunities and choices rather than obstacles or insurmountable challenges.

Taking an equity-minded approach allows mentors to see past students' test scores, at-risk characteristics and difficult backgrounds; it prevents mentors from assigning students a likelihood of success or retention based on a high school credential or personal demographic criteria. Mentors believe that students who have faced hardships in the past have the potential to succeed in college – despite statistics or the dominant paradigm which predicts their likelihood of dropping out – as long as they are motivated to follow an academic plan and adhere to academic strategies in which the mentors trust. This belief is consistent with equity-minded practice. “We know what we offer,” said Bishop, “we know what we can give them to be successful. All we need is that passion for opportunity.” In other words, for mentors, test scores and student attributes do not predict student success or failure; instead, mentors are cognizant

that several factors may have impacted a program student's ability to achieve in the past. An equity-minded approach also means that mentors have different conversations with students about potential roadblocks and limitations than what the "dominant paradigm" might suggest (Bensimon, 2007). While a student coming in with below average Math SAT scores might be told by other advisors that medical school or nursing school is an impossibility based on those credentials, an equity-minded advisor understands the sociocultural and socioeconomic factors that could have influenced those scores, and seeks to help that student realize their potential in college. As Perry commented, "I don't like to judge students by test scores." If students come into the program with goals that do not match their high school credentials, Perry says, instead of immediately turning them on to another course of study, "we give them three semesters to prove us wrong."

Those three semesters are not without guidance or support from the program. When asked specifically about what it takes for at-risk students like those in the program to make it at an institution, most of the mentors cited motivation as the mitigating factor. That motivation goes beyond their desire to achieve a concrete goal like becoming a physician, but is really about what changes they are motivated to make in order to pursue the goals that they have set for themselves. Bishop gave an example of a student with extremely low test scores who was given that opportunity and succeeded. He said:

We were like ya know, we really feel like she can do it. And she turned out to be one of our finest students, and an excellent nursing student. And you know how the nursing program is *tough*. So she came in and she did her thing and it wasn't easy but she did it because she had that desire to take advantage of our resources.

Because support for this student was based in an equity-minded approach, she was given a chance to succeed in her chosen major, and was not counseled in a different direction merely because of test scores.

In addition to taking advantage of resources, mentors say that the goals students set have to be self-established by the students, in line with that introspective process of self-authorship that students are encouraged to pursue. Being motivated to achieve a goal because a student has been told it is the right choice is not enough; the students must be motivated by goals that have been formed by their developing, nuanced understanding of their own identities and values. Jones described students she has worked with from all different backgrounds, who have encountered many different barriers to success:

It's interesting. I realize that regardless of where they're from, it goes back to their mindset. I've seen students from every community you could possibly find...teachers didn't show up to class or parents didn't care whether or not they went to school, they didn't have food to eat. All of the – 12 people live in one room. And it's interesting, regardless of where they're from, once they've entered this campus environment and given all the same opportunities, it goes to their mindset. Because they have to want it. They have to want it for themselves.

Jones went on to give an example of a student who came from a family with 12 children, who struggled with significant financial and family difficulties, but once he got to campus, was able to carry out his studies and take advantage of the opportunities afforded him by the program without a problem. She noted that he graduated a few years ago, but she was still moved when thinking about his motivation and approach to his studies. “We acknowledge who our population is, and we acknowledge that they do have this right and they do have the potential – *If* given the right resources,” Jones explained.

In part, those resources include the Program A network and resulting mentorship that helps them to set their own goals and stay focused on the everyday tasks that help them get closer to achieving those goals. In fact, Romano cited a student having connections at the institution as the most important factor in an at-risk student's potential success. For students in the program, connections to each other and to their mentors help create the motivation they need to grow as students, developing a sense of self-authorship, becoming more aware of themselves and the goals that will suit their identities, interests and commitments. For students, this translates to a different, arguably more thoughtful way of discussing challenges. Lopez and Morales both discussed changing their majors in part because they were not earning sufficient grades in their original courses of study. For both students, this switch was not seen as a failure, but as a choice: they needed to decide if they were motivated enough to devote the time and effort required to change their behaviors and stimulate their academic progress. Both decided they were not passionate enough about their original choice of major to make those big changes. Lopez said that talking to her SDS, tutor and advisor about her choice was helpful:

[It] really helped me figure out if it's me that's like, kind of not doing what's right, or is it that I'm just not dedicated to the material enough. And the end of the day, I feel like I just wasn't dedicated enough. That really was like, yeah, switch out.

In this way, the equity-minded advice was not that these students could not achieve; it was that they might not be committed enough to the original field to make the choices necessary to succeed. They needed to examine their identities and values in order to re-set their goals. While the end result may have been the same – the student changing to a new major – the student's mindset and motivation remain positive; both Lopez and Morales seemed to feel more confident in having made the choice for themselves.

The equity-minded approach of mentors is also visible in the way that they are aware of the circumstances from which program students have come. Students discussed feeling motivated by the reminders they get from their mentors about how a college degree can change those circumstances both for the students and their families. Lopez discussed those reminders specifically: “You’re here for a reason. You’re here to graduate. You’re here to go to grad school, or whatever it is you’re after. You’re here to get a job, you’re here to not be in the same situation as your parents.” These reminders can be important in keeping students on track and motivated when challenges arise during the semester. Williams talked about what it was like for her to come to college after growing up in an inner city:

When you grow up in [the inner city], you’re kind of – well the people around you make you feel like [that city] is the only thing in the world. And it’s not. There’s so much more you can learn. There’s so many more people you can meet. And there’s so many places you can go. And being able to go to college and meet people who have the same like mind as you, it really shows you that. So a lot of the people [from the program] really showed me. Like ya know, they’re actually people who are from certain situations like me, who are able to, or want to better themselves. And it’s really motivating.

Williams’ experience re-iterates the importance of the connections program students make. Several students also discussed in their interviews, the feeling of being surrounded by non-program students whose problems are different and more manageable than their own. Making connections to equity-minded mentors who are familiar with program students’ unique challenges and believe in their potential, as well as peers who can share that experience with them can help students feel more supported at the institution.

In their own paradigm of student success, mentors believe that motivation is a powerful factor in whether or not a student will persist in college. Mentors focus on motivation in their work with students, and in fact, all of the students interviewed talked about the motivation their

mentors and program staff provided for them in some way. For most students, this motivation came from either a sense of confidence that their mentors displayed and helped instill in the students themselves, or from the expectations of the program which focus on recognizing achievement, and encouraging students to expect more from themselves. Ramirez talked about her mentor's encouragement, saying "I remember her writing at the bottom of every paper, 'Be proud of your work. It is a representation of yourself.' So that made me feel confident...because she believed in us far more than what we believed about ourselves." Similarly, Morales gave an example of her mentor's positive response to her change in major, telling her that she would do great things in her new field. Michaels told a story about gaining confidence for a job interview from his mentor, who reviewed his presentation for the interview and assured him that he deserved the job. His mentor helped eliminate any "feelings of negativity or doubt" as he went into an interview for a highly selective Resident Assistant position; Michaels accepted the role a few weeks later.

Students also reported feeling motivated by similar support around campus; students cited tutors, faculty members and department chairs among those who motivated them to believe in their ability to succeed. Clearly, students are impacted by these positive signs of support. Making students feel confident with a few words of encouragement is not an insignificant or thoughtless effort. As Jones and Perry both discussed, one of program students' most common issues is feeling a debilitating lack of confidence in the classroom and on campus. Having a mentor who believes in students and explicitly shows that belief helps students' self-confidence expand, and encourages students to ask more of themselves than what they thought was possible. The mentors have no doubt that students are capable of achieving, and the expectation is that students will achieve. "It's almost an expectation that you're supposed to do good," explained

Parker. Anderson's explanation affirmed this idea, saying, "I feel like without [the program] I wouldn't be doing as well as I am, because they push me to keep my grades at a certain level." Further, when students perform well, their achievements are recognized, and several students noted how meaningful such recognition or accolades were to them. Students are encouraged to believe in themselves, to hold themselves to higher expectations than they might have previously, and to celebrate their successes alongside their mentors.

Instilling these expectations and motivating students in this way is part of the equity-minded paradigm of student success that mentors have adopted. For mentors, at-risk students can achieve success in college as long as they have the right motivation and access to high-quality practitioner support and institutional resources. Providing access to these resources and working with students on motivation can be seen as responses to the unique challenges that Program A students face when they come to college. Responding to such challenges is evidence of equity-minded practice.

Campus Presence

Among the interactions and conversations between mentors and program students is the discussion of the students' presence on campus. Mentors describe encouraging students to explore involvement opportunities around campus, develop their leadership skills, and become an active part of the campus community. Mentors serve as advisors to clubs and student organizations, which students say both inspires them to join, and makes them more comfortable doing so, since they already have a contact in the organization. Students talk about different leadership opportunities that they may not have had, without the encouragement, support and example of their mentors. This approach to mentorship promotes student involvement since it leads to students joining clubs, organizations and participating in activities.

The mentors interviewed for this study discussed their own co-curricular involvements around campus, beyond their jobs as advisors, faculty, etc. Several of the mentors discussed leading campus organizations and encouraging their students to join the clubs that they advise. Others mentioned teaching courses as adjunct professors as another way to stay in close contact with the students; still others discussed how taking classes and continuing their own education kept them, in some ways, closer to their students' experiences. In addition to fulfilling the mentors' own interests and goals, these pursuits allow mentors' visibility with students. That visibility encourages student involvement because they may be more comfortable attending a club meeting for the first time when they already know the advisor; it also supports involvement by setting an example for students. Several mentors talked about the importance of their students developing leadership skills and taking on campus leadership roles. Bishop expressed pride in the expansive presence of program students in clubs and organizations, and in what program students bring to the student leadership around campus:

If you look at the leadership, you'll see leadership across campus. In terms of student organizations, you'll see [program] students there. If you look at SGA, you'll see [program] students there. You'll look in the [campus newspaper], you'll see [program] students there, like they add that vibrancy to the campus.

The emphasis on leadership is one echoed by the institution as a whole, with the University's mission focused on "servant leadership."

Students discussed their campus involvement and their leadership roles with pride. Several students said they were involved in four or more clubs and organizations, with some taking on multiple leadership roles. Parker talked about his goal of making an impact on campus, and feeling like he had the ability to do so. Students attributed their involvement and leadership development to the program. Lopez said:

I feel like [Program A] has given me a lot of opportunities to get involved on campus, to like become a student leader...cause they're [the program] the reason that I'm involved in a lot of orgs, or honestly even that I have the job I have. They've really helped me a lot.

Daniela Martin expressed a similar sentiment, saying that she never pictured herself as the president of an organization or someone “who people go to in class to ask for help.” However, she says she has taken on both those roles and the resulting confidence has fueled her desire to continue her leadership development. Like Lopez, she attributes her confidence and her success as a student leader to the program:

I just wanna say that without [the program], I wouldn't be the person that I am, the student that I am right now. Just because like I said I was never as confident. I never obtained leadership roles in high school...[now] I'm an established leader on campus, and it's like I never thought I would be here. Yeah, I didn't even think I would be attending college, honestly. So this is amazing.

By changing students' own expectations of themselves for co-curricular involvement, students' confidence grows, fostering and cultivating meaningful campus engagement.

The encouragement to seek co-curricular activities and leadership opportunities outside the program is an important one beyond its positive influence on student confidence and engagement. It also emphasizes to students the importance of branching out beyond the bounds of the program itself. Romano commented, “I would say the one thing that I've observed is that at times it kind of seems like [the program] can be a little isolated.” Other mentors also brought up this possibility, as a side effect of the safe space Program A creates for students. Sometimes, mentors commented, that space is too comfortable, and students do not seek connections or opportunities outside of the program. This isolation seems like an unsurprising consequence of both the very close relationships developed between students and program staff over the summer term, and at-risk students' general timidity in approaching faculty or students on a college

campus. In fact, while about half of the student participants talked about participating in leadership roles and organizations outside of Program A, the other half mentioned Program A-specific activities, or membership in organizations closely affiliated with Program A or advised by a Program A staff member. This finding reinforces the evidence of isolation within the program, as students are involved with co-curricular activities at the program level, but not necessarily externally, with the campus as a whole.

Still, program staff emphasize the importance of students exploring campus beyond the program and pushing students out of the comfort zone created by the program's support. Lauren said, "I believe we have an obligation to work with the campus and be a part of the campus community, but also be a part of the community across the state. I don't want our students to have a singular identity." There is a lot of time spent investing in the relationships between and among students and program staff/faculty, and having students establishing trust in the program and its representatives. The next step, then, is when the mentors ask students to think more broadly about their development and their campus experiences. The mentors' encouragement and reassurance to do so as well as their visibility around campus is designed to inspire students to become more involved and develop a presence on campus that suits the students' interests and goals; the results of those efforts on students' campus engagement appear to be varied.

Navigating the System

Students and mentors talk about different ways that students are coached by their mentors in navigating a college campus. This is especially valuable for first-generation students. Teaching students how to approach a course issue with a faculty member, access financial aid resources, or interact with classmates facilitates the kind of faculty interaction and collaborative learning experiences which indicate high levels of engagement. Further, mentors work with

program students to discuss and address feelings of marginalization on a college campus; these feelings can stem from a number of different factors common to program students, including first-generation status, racial/ethnic background or socioeconomic background. Mentors offer support in helping students to adjust to a collegiate culture with which program students are often unfamiliar.

When asked about the ways in which their mentors and the summer program have helped them, students rattle off a number of ‘navigating the system’ type tasks: how to apply for a job on campus, how to fill out financial aid forms, how to change a major, what paperwork is necessary to withdraw from a course, and how to approach a professor during office hours are a few examples. Jones noted that she regularly gives students advice on things as simple as “how to craft an email, how to talk to someone, how to shake someone’s hand.” Both students and mentors understand that, in a way, the students have entered a new world, and need direction in navigating their interactions. Mentors are there for support as well. Perry said:

We try to teach them how to have a conversation in which they disagree with what the professor says, but understand that the professor makes the final determination.

Sometimes it’s good and sometimes it’s bad, but that’s how it is in college. So that’s how they get to know the system here.

Through these coaching sessions with mentors, students have a better idea of how to approach situations that are typically new to first year college students. The summer program itself provides exposure to and experience with collegiate systems that instills confidence in students. Michaels described feeling confident in the support he had from the summer program since he did not have a parent in his life who had attended college and could offer “that assistance, that help, that know-how” regarding how things work on a college campus. Additionally, Lopez discussed feeling nervous about moving from high school, where all her classes were in one

hallway, to crossing campus and finding buildings throughout the day. Simply attending the summer program made her feel more confident in navigating this part of the college experience.

While many of the navigational learning experiences students and mentors describe are typical for any student transitioning to a college campus, others are more complex, deriving from program students' first-generation status, sociocultural background, or previous academic experiences. In many ways, just being different in any of the afore-mentioned categories can make a program student feel like an outsider, and perhaps feel overwhelmed about trying to be successful in a new place. Perry explained:

For most of our students they are the majority where they come from, but then they're the minority here, and they have to make that adjustment. And I'm defining minority in terms of academic development, not necessarily racial diversity or anything like that.

Although Perry focused on academic development, feeling like a minority in terms of race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status can also make a student feel isolated or intimidated.

Several program students commented on the challenges of being surrounded by classmates who express financial concerns that are much less severe than their own, or family problems that pale in comparison to the struggles they have endured. Other program students expressed feeling marginalized in a community of mostly white, affluent students, when they did not match that profile. Ramirez said:

Coming from, um, how do I describe this? The community where I lived before coming to college was very um, was predominantly Hispanic. So I was used to the environment. When coming to college, I was not as confident about my work. I know I have an accent which is kind of hard also, but there you don't notice it as much because there everybody has an accent.

That feeling of insecurity derived from feeling different than the rest of the campus community was expressed by several students interviewed. Starting school at a new place is difficult; starting

school at a new place where you feel different than almost everyone else, and where it seems that others have had many similar experiences which you have not had, is even more difficult.

Mentors expressed awareness of this difficulty and how it affects students, especially in the first semester or two of college. “They’re keeping up a mask all day, and they’re exerting a lot of energy trying to act like something that they feel they’re not, *imposter syndrome* and all that,” Rivera explained. In addition to being sympathetic to that concern and providing students with an outlet to feel at ease to express themselves, mentors’ conversations with students also evolve into discussions of marginalization. Both students and mentors’ descriptions seemed similar to the literary concept of diaspora, in which a person feels at once a part of and simultaneously disconnected from both his old community and his new one – as if, after re-locating, he does not truly belong to either place. Because of this feeling, mentors often have conversations with students about the communities from which they have come and how things might be different in a collegiate community. Rivera described these conversations:

Helping them navigate that, I think, whole culture, the acculturation process, and how to access resources, and how to do everything that’s successful for a college student that might be different than how they lived their life before. How do you navigate that transition? That is something that for a lot of our at-risk students is because they’re holding onto a life that they’ve had for so long that it’s very hard to just let that go to grab onto a different life.

Acknowledging the difficulty of this transition is important for students who feel like many of their college classmates – outside of their program peers – cannot relate to who they are or what their lives have been like before college. When students talked about this kind of support from their mentors, they alluded to a sense of understanding that their mentors had regarding the feeling of marginalization. Martin commented that, “it’s really hard to feel included as a person. Especially as a woman. And as a person of color,” but that program staff made her feel like she

belonged on campus. Ramirez said that during the summer, program staff would remind them that “a lot of people were going through the same things,” and that they should not feel alone. Two students expressed feeling aligned with mentors because of a common racial/ethnic background, with one student joining the Latino/Hispanic organization on campus because her mentor was the advisor, and another being inspired by her Latino mentor’s graduate school pursuits: “He’s also Latino, so it’s cool to see him pursuing education.” Generally, students feel like their mentors can understand feelings of marginalization and respond to it in some ways.

Beyond sympathizing and understanding, though, mentors and students also talked about the push for students to learn more about collegiate culture and adjust accordingly. Parker gave an example of an art class in which he was enrolled that had been giving him trouble. Thinking it would be an easy class, Parker was astounded to learn about the complexity of discussion and thought processes that surround the study of art, to which he has had little exposure. “It’s like learning an entire different language,” he said, “I look at a painting and I just think oh it’s nice because I like the colors. But why? What [do] the colors mean? It’s like a whole new world.” Parker went on to discuss his approach to the class, discussing his challenges with his professor, his SDS, and trying to learn that new, “different language” with which he was unfamiliar. Rivera also gave an example of an art class in discussing how students might be able to adapt to collegiate culture. He discussed asking students to consider if they could integrate the concepts they have learned from various forms of art they are now familiar with – both the Jay-Z song and the Monet painting. Next, it is important for students to think about why it is important to know both, why it is important for them to be familiar with art, music and concepts that are common to a college-educated population. Students are encouraged not to forget about or give up on the cultural concepts with which they grew up, but instead to find a way to adapt a new perspective,

encompassing both old and new cultures. In this way, students learn to navigate the system not just in terms of forms and procedures, but in terms of their thinking and intellectual growth.

Conclusion

The structure of the summer program intentionally provides multiple and on-going ways for students to connect with potential mentors. The interactions arranged throughout the summer term are also structured, with program design guiding discussions between students and practitioners toward topics that will help students to examine their values, identities, and goals, and to share that process of self-examination with their peers and mentors. It is evident that the rigorous nature of the summer program helps students build academic confidence, in having successfully achieved a task they perceived as difficult and then using that accomplishment as evidence of their capabilities as they proceed into the full-time semester. The structure of the program exposes students to a plethora of campus resources, but the close-knit community and myriad offerings of support from Program A itself may keep students from branching out beyond the program's resources. While this encourages engagement at the program level, it may not have the same effect on students' campus engagement.

The mentoring relationships established by students and practitioners through the summer program are based in an equity-minded, intrusive, holistic approach to advising students. Mentors emphasize the importance of individualizing support for students, and students feel valued as a result of that type of support. Mentors focus on helping students develop ownership for their own education, building a sense of self-authorship through purposeful conversations about values and goals. Mentors also counsel students on the importance of leadership and establishing a presence on campus, as well as the information needed to navigate the policies and procedures of a college campus. Overall, the structure of the program and the strategies

employed by the mentors in this study are purposefully and carefully designed to help students establish academic confidence and engage with the campus community in ways that support student success.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

This study provides insight into the mentoring relationships formed between bridge program students considered at-risk due to low-income and/or first-generation status, and the practitioners who offer them support and guidance. A qualitative case study approach allowed for a deeper understanding of both sides of a mentoring relationship and a close look at what methods and approaches are used by mentors who work with at-risk students, how students respond to those methods and approaches, and how at-risk students understand their experiences in the bridge program and with mentoring relationships.

Summary of Findings

Bridge programs have become an integral way for institutions to address issues of access for students who are considered at-risk due to low-income, first-generation, racial/ethnic minority or underrepresented status. It is important to determine how the expanded access that bridge programs create can also support accountability efforts for institutions. In other words, colleges must focus on not just enrolling at-risk students through bridge programs, but also on helping them to navigate their college careers and progress to obtaining degrees. Previous literature on bridge programs has focused on student attributes and/or various, quantitative student outcomes associated with bridge program participation (e.g., GPA or retention rates). These studies are, however, limited in their methodological approach to show a causal relationship between program participation and GPA or retention, since there are many other factors which may affect those quantitative outcomes. Furthermore, findings regarding GPA and retention are inconsistent, with some studies showing bridge programs having positive effects on such outcomes, and others showing no effect. Thus, the existence of a bridge program alone is not a solution for increasing access to college while maintaining accountability. To understand

the influence of bridge programs, a more nuanced approach must be taken in the form of qualitative research. Qualitative research allows for a better understanding of process and implementation, of how things function or do not function within the program. The inconsistency of quantitative results confirms the importance of expanding research on bridge programs to examine not just outcomes, but program components, and what approaches and strategies work best for at-risk students who may benefit from completing a bridge program. Qualitative research is best suited for providing a deeper level of investigation necessary to obtain such rich data.

Bridge program structures vary significantly from program to program, but almost all bridge programs offer access to mentorship to their students. This study expands our understanding of mentorship, with a special focus on the role of the practitioner in establishing mentoring relationships, as one of the key components of bridge programs. The purpose of this study was to better understand the ways in which mentoring relationships may influence students' development of academic confidence and campus engagement. This study sought to learn more about the ways that mentors approach work with at-risk bridge program students and the ways that students perceive and pursue personal and social relations with mentors. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How does a summer bridge program foster mentoring relationships between students and institutional agents?
 - a. What policies, practices, and/or structures are in place to foster mentoring relationships?
 - b. In what ways do a program's components or conditions facilitate student-mentor interactions?
2. How do mentoring relationships developed in the context of a bridge program influence program participants' academic confidence and campus engagement during college?

- a. What approaches and methods are employed by mentors in working with bridge program students?
- b. How do mentors describe their influence on students' development of academic confidence and campus engagement?
- c. How do students describe their experience working with mentors and their mentoring relationships?
- d. How do students describe the role of mentors in the development of their academic confidence and campus engagement?

Findings from this study were organized according to the main research questions, with the first section focusing on bridge program structure and the second on mentoring relationships.

Structure of the Summer Program

Findings suggest that the structure of the program purposefully provides multiple opportunities for students and potential mentors to connect in significant ways. Carefully designed workshops, classroom sessions and social programming tailored specifically to the needs of the students in the cohort allow students and potential mentors to make connections quickly and beyond the surface level. The academically rigorous nature of the program created circumstances that either required or encouraged students to seek support from practitioners who were prepared and available to assist and advise. This challenge made mentors a valuable resource for students from the very beginning of their interactions; it also created a comfort level with the program and its practitioners that might sometimes unintentionally foster an isolation within the program for students due in part to a sense of a small, tight-knit community. This paradox of a close-knit and yet somewhat isolated community might not allow students to fully engage with a broader campus community.

Program structure supported regular and frequent interaction between students and program staff and faculty. It also facilitated frequent exploration and use of campus resources and support systems to which students had continued access after the bridge program as full-time students; however, the program also provided similar, insular services in the form of tutoring, workshops and skills counseling that may prevent students from seeking the campus resources provided by departments outside the bridge program. This availability fosters the students' comfort level within the program while sometimes fostering program isolation. The structure of the bridge program also supports a family-like atmosphere that is maintained long after its conclusion, prompting a close-knit community in which mentoring relationships are cultivated and persist throughout students' collegiate experiences. While this close-knit community is beneficial for the growth of connections with mentors, it may also prevent students from venturing outside the program and engaging with campus resources, programs and activities.

Mentoring Relationships

Based on an equity-minded approach, mentors' relationships with program students are focused on the student's development of self-authorship (Magolda, 2008), which mentors described as ownership and accountability for their own values, goals and education. Mentors develop their relationships with students by using a holistic approach, ensuring students that they understand and support students in navigating the various non-academic pressures and obstacles that low-income and first-generation students often face. The structure of the program, which allows mentors to display their knowledge of such challenges and work with students on addressing them through various curricular and co-curricular programming, facilitates this growth in the mentor-student relationship.

Mentors also provide motivational support and guide students in establishing a presence on campus through student clubs, organizations and campus activities. These efforts to help students branch out and engage with the campus culture beyond the program seem to have varied results. In some instances, students hold leadership roles and are active participants in classes and student groups which are not affiliated with the bridge program, attributing their leadership growth to support from the program and program mentors; this behavior suggests campus engagement. In other instances, students describe an involvement that may not be defined as campus engagement. These students are members of bridge program-specific clubs, participate in program activities, and may have joined a campus club or organization because their mentors' encouragement or participation made it more comfortable to do so. However, it is unclear that the involvement for these students goes beyond their presence or membership; it is also unclear how much this group of students engage with non-program students or practitioners even when they belong to a campus club that is not affiliated with the program. These students described some involvement on campus, without indicators of engagement such as faculty interaction or collaborative learning experiences with students or practitioners who were not part of the bridge program.

Mentors emphasize the importance of instilling confidence in at-risk students by believing in their ability to succeed; students express the value of knowing that there is someone on campus who cares about them and sees their potential. Students react positively to this motivational approach, feeling secure in knowing that there is someone on campus who understands their unique challenges and goals, and is capable of helping them throughout their college careers. Students reported that they felt more academically confident in various

categories, and their high level of involvement in campus clubs, organizations and activities pointed to a potential for campus engagement.

Mentors described a high-level commitment to their students as a result of the individual attention and in-depth counseling that they believe is essential for at-risk students' success. Mentors described the need to keep themselves focused on individualizing the programming and advising for students each summer; mentors also discussed the long hours they spend on campus to help their students and the program, at times neglecting their social and family lives. This approach was described as rewarding, but work-intensive. While mentors did not extensively discuss the difficulty of maintaining such a commitment to students, the work required to offer students such holistic and personal mentorship may make practitioners feel overwhelmed or overloaded.

Overall, the findings indicate that the structure of a bridge program can significantly support the creation and development of mentoring relationships, and that mentorship helps bridge program students cultivate academic confidence; while mentoring relationships may potentially help students become more engaged on campus, the structure of the program and its sometimes insular nature may also prevent students from becoming engaged in campus outside of the program.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of this study are mostly consistent with the literature on bridge programs, at-risk students and mentorship; however, the findings for this study offer a nuanced and intimate view of the way that students and mentors relate to one another within the context of a bridge program and beyond its conclusion. This study provides further evidence that participating in a bridge program makes students engage with campus supports and utilize campus resources (Garcia, 1991); it is also consistent with the finding that bridge program participation can increase

students' sense of belonging, as seen in several other studies (Michael et al., 2010; Hoffman et al., 2002; Strayhorn, 2011; Suzuki, 2012). Previous studies have also found that bridge programs produce positive outcomes when they focus on the development of academic skills, especially through academic workshops and individual support of skill development (McCurrie, 2009; Ghazzawi & Jagannathan, 2011). Moreover, previous research has shown that this focus on academic skill development can help increase academic confidence (Kallison & Stader, 2012; Strayhorn, 2011). This study reinforced those ideas, with all students reporting increased academic confidence in several categories on the academic confidence scale (Sanders, 2006), such as participating in class discussions and knowing how to study. Students attributed their growth in confidence at least in part to the program's academic supports in the form of workshops, tutoring or individual coaching. Similarly, this study extends previous research indicating that in general, mentorship of college students fosters student engagement and the development of academic confidence (Tovar, 2015; Schreiner et al., 2011; Engstrom, 2008; Walpole, 2008). In this study, students indicated that their relationships with mentors encouraged them to actively engage in co-curricular activities (e.g., join clubs, participate in activities and seek leadership positions around campus). It is clear that mentoring relationships facilitated the growth of engagement at the program level, while findings on the influence of mentoring relationships on students' campus engagement were varied. The insular nature of the program, which provides many benefits for at-risk students, can also prevent them from venturing outside the program's offerings to engage with the full campus culture. However, the findings of this study suggest that mentorship plays a critical role in fostering success-oriented behaviors, such as attending tutoring and academic skills workshops, among at-risk, bridge program students,

similar to previous studies that highlight the importance of the mentor-student relationship in helping traditional students to succeed in college (Bettinger & Baker, 2011).

This study is significant for several reasons as it takes a more in-depth look at several aspects of mentorship and the development of mentoring relationships for at-risk students. The significance of the findings for this study lies in the way that it explores the practitioner perspective vis-à-vis the student viewpoint, providing insight into the ways that practitioner approach to student support can shape a mentoring relationship with an at-risk student. Furthermore, purposeful program structure, for example, enables practitioners to show their students – through tailored workshops, programs and activities – that they are cognizant of the non-academic pressures and challenges that at-risk students face. Purposeful structure also provides multiple, on-going opportunities for students and potential mentors to connect in significant ways, in that they are not just thrown together in the same room, but participate in structured activities or conversations that facilitate the growth of a mentoring relationship. Further, students respond positively to mentors' holistic approach and their emphasis on self-authorship through discussions of internal vs. external influences on students' goals and values. This study provides a better understanding as to how practitioners build trust with at-risk students, and how successful mentors use every interaction with students to build a mentoring relationship grounded in trust.

This study is significant in that it offers the practitioner's perspective, which is scarce in the literature on college student success for bridge programs. The findings in this study highlight the importance and the responsibility of the role practitioners play in fostering at-risk student engagement. This study provides a deeper understanding of how a mentoring relationship between a student and a practitioner is created and maintained. Moreover, this study examines

mentoring relationships in depth, exploring the ways that these relationships evolve and how trust is built between student and practitioner. It offers concrete strategies that mentors use in attempt to foster development in students, offering practitioners ideas about how to approach relationships with at-risk students. This study explores not just *if* mentorship is related to engagement and academic confidence, but *how* students can capitalize on sustained mentorship in order to succeed in college. Specifically, it explores how mentors identify and address barriers to student engagement with the program itself, if not with the campus as a whole; the findings offer concrete solutions for bridge program practitioners looking to foster engagement, like program-created clubs and mentors acting as organizational advisors. The findings also offer concrete solutions for bridge program practitioners looking to increase students' academic confidence, like the conversations between mentor and student which encourage students to develop a sense of self-authorship by examining their values, goals and the sources from which both have been developed in order to grow as students and take more ownership over their own education.

Perhaps this study is most significant in its exploration of practitioners' equity-minded (Bensimon, 2007) approaches both within the bridge program and within the mentoring relationships established with at-risk students. Equity-minded practitioners see the importance of their own roles in the success or failure of at-risk students; they acknowledge the unique difficulties that disadvantaged college students face, and understand that it is sometimes these factors – and not ability or potential – that affect a student's academic performance or high school outcomes (in the form of standardized test scores or GPA) (Bensimon, 2007). This study shifts the focus of student success literature away from student credentials as predictive indicators of success and onto the role of practitioners, as they play a major part in the way

students respond (or do not respond) to a campus and its supports. The findings suggest that the bridge program in this study has established or at least operates in a “culture of inquiry,” one in which the stakeholders consistently reflect on the program’s practices and how they may be adapted to best support students and address program issues and problems (Witham & Bensimon, 2012). In this study, evidence of operating in a “culture of inquiry” is present in the way that practitioners reflect upon and respond to the issues faced by new student cohorts each summer. Its focus on institutional and program responsibility rather than on predictive student attributes also indicates a culture of inquiry (Witham & Bensimon, 2012). In the execution of equity-minded practice suggested by this study, it extends Witham & Bensimon (2012)’s concept of single-loop and double-loop learning; single-loop learning addresses the symptoms of the sickness without treating the disease – or the surface-level problems, but not their causes – while double-loop learning investigates the causes of a problem and the values that have created it in trying to generate solutions (Witham & Bensimon, 2012). Since mentors adapt strategies and approaches to match the student group’s specific needs, this practice may be seen as a rejection of single-loop learning; the program does not devise one-size-fits-all solutions that are focused on solving a problem without questioning how the problem came to be or what underlying factors have created it. Instead, this study suggests the success of a double-loop learning approach for practitioners, in the way that the program is focused on making sure its practices and its mentors’ approaches reflect the values that they know will help at-risk students to succeed. This study offers evidence of practitioners who bring “invisible issues” (Witham & Bensimon, 2012, p. 49) to light, such as racial/ethnic or socioeconomic influences on students’ progression in college; this is seen in Rivera’s workshopping with students on effective communication with their classmates to address racial tension, and the challenge that minority

students experience in feeling like they do not belong on a mostly white, privileged campus. It is also seen in Bishop's detailed and individualized financial counseling, which anticipates the confusion a first-generation student may experience in interpreting a tuition bill, or Jones' contingency planning for registration, which accounts for delays in tuition payments that then delay course enrollment. Further, the individualized approach to each student relationship suggests a double-loop learning approach, in that the mentor is tailoring a response and support plan for each individual student, addressing the specific barriers and issues that have created the students' challenges, instead of administering general advice to address only the challenges at surface level.

This double-loop strategy, examining the values behind problems and tailoring solutions for individual students and cohorts, requires a major commitment from the practitioners in the way that they approach mentorship. While mentors did not complain about the amount of effort necessary to maintain this approach, they did allude to long hours, neglecting their social lives and spending time away from their families. In this study, mentors presented a positive spin on their efforts, expressing the rewarding nature of their work. However, intuitively, such a major commitment might lead to burn-out among practitioners as it seems difficult to uphold a fulfilling work-life balance while taking on such responsibility with their students. It is also easy to see how a mentor might revert back to a single-loop approach with some or all students in times of exhaustion or overload. While the 'team of mentors' culture and the various committees that meet to discuss at-risk students provide a check on practitioners' approaches, mentors are largely working with students one-on-one. Thus, taking a less rigorous approach – for example, referring a student who expresses concern for tuition payments directly to financial aid, rather than asking more questions about the causes of his/her issues and how they may be affecting

his/her academic performance – might be feasible in busy times. While mentors did not directly address the issues of burn-out or overload when discussing their mentoring approaches, instead focusing on the rewarding experience of helping at-risk students, it seems these could be downsides of the double-loop approach being examined in this case study. More research into how such an intense commitment affects practitioners' practices is needed.

While it may or may not be common for a culture of inquiry or double-loop learning to be present within a bridge program, this study explores these mentalities in practice, and provides some response to the questions posed by the establishment of such theories, such as: What does a culture of inquiry look like? How does a bridge program use double-loop learning to support its students? How do mentors apply double-loop learning to their interactions with at-risk students? Without research examining how these ideas are applied in practice, they will remain abstract theories. This study suggests research on bridge programs should explore those theories by moving away from predictive relations between student attributes and outcomes; instead, bridge program research should more closely examine the practitioners' perspective in bridge program implementation, and the processes that drive the ways that practitioners work with students.

This study also lends some insight into the inconsistency of results found in previous studies on bridge programs. Previous research has suggested that some bridge programs produce positive outcomes for students, and others simply do not (Sablan, 2013), without offering much explanation as to why this inconsistency exists. While it is certainly true that the variability of bridge program structures, institutions, and student populations make it difficult to study the outcomes of bridge programs as a whole, the effectiveness of double-loop learning suggested by this study indicates that the process of developing solutions for at-risk students is more

transferable – if not more important – than the actual solutions put into practice. Thus, perhaps the inconsistency of results has more to do with the approach each bridge program takes in creating support for its students, than with the bridge program’s student population, practitioners’ credentials, or institutional offerings. With this idea in mind, it not too surprising, then, that the bridge program studies which have reported success have most often been the small-scale programs that target very specific groups of students (e.g. Ghazzawi & Jagannathan, 2011; Keim et al., 2010, Fletcher et al., 2001; Murphy et al., 2010). Smaller programs with a narrowly targeted student population are likely better equipped to reflect on the specific values and issues behind their students’ barriers to success, and then respond to those barriers on an individual level. In other words, those studies which report successful outcomes have also described circumstances which foster a double-loop learning process for practitioners. My own study suggests that this is not a coincidence, that a program’s success depends on its approach to working with students and the ways that it can address at-risk student issues below the surface. Perhaps only by examining the processes used to run bridge programs and those processes utilized by practitioners can researchers determine bridge programs’ ability to achieve their intended outcomes: expanding access to higher education for at-risk and underrepresented populations of college students.

Recommendations for Practice

There is much to be learned from examining the structure of a successful bridge program like the one in this study, and the mentoring relationships established as a result of it. Based on this research, bridge programs might consider the following recommendations:

- **Multiple, On-going Student-Mentor Connections:** Bridge program structure must create multiple, on-going and purposeful ways for students to connect with potential mentors. It is

important that these structured connections provide some basis for student-mentor bonding, beyond students and mentors getting acquainted with one other. The interactions must be made meaningful by responding to the needs of the students, whatever those needs may be. Bridge program structure must go beyond a single networking night, in which students and faculty are in a room together, beyond placing a potential peer mentor on the program students' residential floor. The program structure must make the most of those interactions, developing programming that will create bonds or policies that will connect students and potential mentors for more than one point in the bridge program. The connections must begin with trust building between the student and the practitioner, and gradually evolve into the kinds of introspective mentoring discussions which encourage self-authorship. While the kinds of interactions will certainly vary by program type and student population, the consistency of meaningful interaction must be built into the structure of the program.

- **A Rigorous Program:** Whatever the content of the bridge program, the structure of it should provide a challenge for students. At-risk students often display low academic confidence and benefit from seeing themselves meet goals that they perceive as difficult to achieve. The bridge program should set ambitious but achievable goals for students and then help them to meet those goals. Students will establish confidence in themselves and trust in the program practitioners who helped them to achieve academic success.
- **Establishing a Team of Student Support:** Additionally, practitioners must communicate with each other to best support students. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a whole campus community to graduate a student. Faculty, staff and administrators must communicate with one another regarding students' progress, issues, and concerns. While it is impossible for one practitioner to know everything about a student which may influence

his or her success in college, several practitioners working together can enhance each other's understanding of a student's challenges and growth. Bridge programs must approach their student support as a team of practitioners working together. For example, the program tutor, summer course professor, academic advisor and peer mentor must all communicate about the student's progress and what issues or challenges the student faces as he or she progresses through the program.

- **The Bridge Program Family:** Bridge program structure should support a team or family like atmosphere of support. Establishing a team and/or family atmosphere within the program helps students feel connected to the program itself, to each other, to their potential mentors, and to the campus. This study has shown how important that feeling is for students who do not feel like they have family support outside of the program or institution. It offers a degree of stability which helps to meet a student's basic needs of family and security before the student can think more critically about academic progress.
- **On-going Support that Extends After the Program Ends:** Students who see their relationships with practitioners ending after they complete the bridge program will not make the investment in trust and time needed to create a meaningful mentoring relationship. Students need to know that their potential mentors will be available to them after they complete the program; students need to know that their relationships with the practitioners in the program are not temporary and that the support they rely upon during the program will persist when they become full-time college students. Therefore, bridge programs need to establish a clear transition plan of support for students to move from the summer session to the full academic semester. Before the summer program begins, students need to be made

aware of this plan and how they will be supported through the transition so that they have confidence in the lasting nature of the relationships established in the summer term.

- **Encouraging Engagement Outside the Program:** The structure of the bridge program and its mentoring support should encourage campus involvement outside of the program. While it is important for students to feel safe and stable within the program, practitioners should set up structures or practices that prevent program students' dependence on the program or isolation within it. Program practitioners should make a point of helping students branch out to explore different resources and involvement opportunities outside of the program. The program structure should include students learning about and utilizing campus supports during the summer term; program practitioners can set an example of outreach by becoming involved in student organizations themselves or by displaying to students productive ways to conduct outreach (e.g. calling a colleague in counseling services before referring a student there, or collaborating with a faculty member to implement a co-curricular event for program students).
- **An Equity-Minded Approach:** Finally, and perhaps most importantly, bridge programs must be designed in a culture of inquiry, or one in which practitioners use data as a starting point in reflective problem-solving and focus on the institution's responsibility – rather than “student deficits” – in establishing an action plan (Witham & Bensimon, 2012, p. 47). Program design and practitioners must also utilize double-loop learning, a practice by which institutions approach problems by bringing “invisible issues (e.g. racial inequities)” to light, and examining not just the problems themselves, but the values and conditions which created or perpetuate the problems (Witham & Bensimon, 2012, p. 49). For program designers, this means responding thoughtfully and purposefully to the specific and unique

needs of the at-risk students participating in the bridge program. For practitioners establishing mentoring relationships with program students, it means taking the time to learn about and challenge students on the values and experiences that have shaped their goals and behaviors; this practice facilitates the development of self-authorship in students. Additionally, programs must employ equity-minded practitioners, or those practitioners who are aware that things like “power asymmetries” in our culture affect at-risk student outcomes, including standardized test scores or high school GPAs; equity-minded practitioners also recognize and acknowledge their own and the institution’s role in a student’s success or failure in college (Bensimon, 2007, p. 446). Equity-minded practitioners will not dismiss a student’s chance of success based on previous student outcomes; equity-minded practitioners understand that mentorship and institutional support will make a difference in a student’s success or failure. Operating with this mentality is essential for any bridge program practitioner, since at-risk college students often have complex and on-going challenges which prevent them from engaging with the campus. It must be the program’s responsibility to help students address those challenges and find ways to engage with the campus. Bridge program practitioners must realize that program structure and mentoring approach must be flexible and adapt to each cohort, and to each student. A one-size-fits-all approach to bridge programs – or any work with at-risk students – is sure to fail.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research on practitioner approach and involvement in at-risk student success is still quite new, and it is important that researchers continue to gather information on bridge programs,

mentorship, and practitioner approach in relation to at-risk student success. Research on this topic might be expanded in the following ways:

- A follow-up study on the same group of students and mentors. It would be valuable to see how the student and mentor relationships evolves or disconnects as the student progresses. This study should also monitor students' academic success, co-curricular engagement with the program and with the campus, and progress to graduation.
- Similar studies with larger sample sizes to include more and broader student and mentor perspectives. Additionally, more detailed exploration of the beginning of the student-mentor relationship might be useful, to get a deeper understanding of how trust is initially built between the two groups. This might be accomplished by conducting the study at the start of the bridge program with observations and interviews conducted as the program proceeds, allowing for insight into student and mentor perspectives as relationship-building occurs, instead of reflective insight as this study provides.
- A study with a more specific focus on self-authorship in at-risk students, and how it influences students' relationships with potential mentors. Analyzing the structure of bridge programs through the lens of self-authorship would provide further insight on how policies and student supports can impact a student's development of self-authorship outside of the student's relationship with a mentor.
- A study comparing how different settings (e.g. public vs. private institution, different sizes of bridge programs) may influence the development of the student-mentor relationship and how trust is formed between students and mentors. It would also be valuable to conduct a study on programs with varied structures, to explore the different ways that program design can influence the way that students and mentors connect.

- Research on the different bridge programs at the institution in this study. The institution in this study hosts four different bridge programs to help students transition to college level academic work and integrate into campus culture. It would be valuable to learn how varied program structures on the same campus may influence student success, and how different bridge programs approach mentorship on the same campus.
- A study comparing the experiences of students within Program A and those non-Program A students who meet Program A admission criteria. Program A students and mentors explicitly and consistently mentioned the advantage of the financial aid package students receive through the program. A comparison study of students with the same socioeconomic status, at the same institution, without the benefit of Program A's financial assistance, would lend insight on the role that financial stability plays in helping at-risk students.
- A focus on practitioners in the research on student success and bridge programs. Specifically, research should expand to explore the presence of equity-mindedness and a culture of inquiry, especially in bridge programs with established outcomes. It would be beneficial to analyze the processes that exist within bridge programs which report positive outcomes in the form of increased GPA, credit acquisition and retention rates, and compare those to processes that exist within those bridge programs which have not reported those outcomes.
- A study on practitioner burn-out or work-life balance. The commitment that double-loop learning and a culture of inquiry requires of its practitioners can be draining. It is important to investigate the sustainability of these practices for mentors who are overloaded.

- The role of equity-mindedness in practitioners working with bridge program students. For example, what experiences or approaches help prepare equity-minded practitioners to work effectively with students? In what ways do practitioners work with each other to support students in bridge programs? In what ways do practitioners approach work with at-risk students differently than their work with traditional students? There is much to learn about the role of practitioners in bridge programs; exploring their approach to mentoring students is just the beginning.
- A quantitative study into the causal impacts of bridge programs using a difference-in-difference or instrument variable methodology. Most of the quantitative impact studies on bridge programs have focused on simple correlations or associations between increased GPA, credit acquisition, retention rates and bridge program participation. More sophisticated research design and specific data are needed on the way that bridge programs may affect these outcomes.

Conclusion

At best, bridge programs are the solution to higher education's access problem, providing a supportive and productive route to college degree attainment for at-risk and underrepresented students, diversifying the nation's institutions at every level. At worst, bridge programs are a Band-Aid on the problem of access, lacking any accountability for student progression and providing little more than a public relations display to address diversity and elitism in American higher education. The existing literature has offered inconsistent results of bridge program outcomes, and thus little perspective on where bridge programs generally fall on the scale of best to worst case scenarios. The findings in this study point to bridge programs' potential to operate in or near that best case scenario, creating realistic and replicable paths for at-risk students to

gain not just access to, but success in college. The significance of the problem that bridge programs address and their real potential to do so make development in the research on bridge programs and on practitioner approach to their implementation vital, especially as the nation's wealth and income gap grows tirelessly. It is time to dig below the surface of bridge programs, to investigate beyond their outcomes and students' attributes. It is time to examine and improve the components and practitioners which comprise bridge programs, those elements and people at the heart of their operation which will ultimately determine their success or failure.

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Appendix A

Bridge Program Director Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself. What brought you to Seton Hall University? How did you end up in your current role?
2. Can you tell me a little about how the bridge program is set up? Can you describe the structure to me? What requirements or benchmarks do you ask students to meet?
3. Can you tell me about your experiences working with bridge program students?
4. What would you say are the goals of your bridge program?
5. In what ways does the program work with institutional resources and personnel?
6. Especially for at-risk students, there are many ideas about what contributes to a student's success or lack of success once he/she gets to college. In your opinion, and based on your own experiences, what are the most important factors that determine whether or not a student will 'make it' at an institution?
7. How do you think the personnel who work with students in the program influence those factors in a student's college experience?
8. Finally, thinking in broad terms, how would you describe your own philosophy and/or approach to working with or mentoring at-risk college students?

Appendix B

Bridge Program Student Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself: what brought you to Seton Hall University? What do you hope to study (intended major)?
2. Can you describe for me what your experiences in the bridge program have been like so far?
3. What kind of activities do you participate in (or hope to participate in) outside of classes?
4. Tell me about your classes so far. What has been challenging? And how have you dealt with those challenges?
5. In the future, how will you handle challenges that come up in your classes?
6. Tell me about your professors and the people who work with you in the bridge program. Do you ever see your professors or the people who work with your program outside of class? How often do you interact with them? In what ways?
7. In what ways, if at all, do you feel that your professors or the people who work with you in the bridge program help you to do well academically? How, if at all, do you feel like this institution/campus helps you to do well academically?
8. Think back to when you first started here, your first day of the program. I'm going to give you a few categories, and I'd like you to describe how confident you felt on that very first day, coming into the program:
 - a. Attend your classes and program required sessions on time
 - b. Knowing how to study
 - c. Keep up with / learn class material
 - d. Participate in class discussions and presentations
 - e. Ask your professors questions when something is confusing
 - f. Produce college level writing
 - g. Pass your classes
9. Now, think about each of those items. I'm going to go through them with you again, one by one, and tell me how confident you feel doing each one of these things now.
 - a. Attend your classes and program required sessions on time
 - b. Knowing how to study
 - c. Keep up with / learn class material
 - d. Participate in class discussions and presentations
 - e. Ask your professors questions when something is confusing

- f. Produce college level writing
 - g. Pass your classes
10. I notice that you feel more confident now in *these* areas [name areas] than when you started the program. What do you think made you feel more confident in those areas?
- a. In what ways, if at all, do you think the bridge program or the institution helped you to feel more confident in those ways?
11. What would you say your top academic goals are?
- a. Overall, how confident do you feel that you'll be able to achieve those goals?
 - b. In what ways, if at all, do you think the bridge program or the institution have or will help you to achieve those goals?
12. A mentor is someone who you see as a role model and from whom you might seek advice, even when you're not required to do so. Is there someone – a professor, advisor, etc. – that you've met through the bridge program who you would consider a mentor?
13. Can you tell me more about your mentor? How did you get to know him/her? What role does he/she play at the institution (faculty? Administrator? Tutor?)
14. How often do you communicate with your mentor? In what ways?
15. Can you describe for me a specific challenge that your mentor has helped you with? What did he/she do to help?
- a. Potential follow-up: Can you tell me about the conversation/advice? What kinds of things did you talk about?
 - b. What happened after that conversation? (looking for any follow-up from practitioner)
16. What do you think your mentor might be able to help you with in the future?

Appendix C

Mentor Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself. What brought you to Seton Hall University? How did you end up in your current role?
2. Can you tell me about your experiences working with bridge program students?
3. In what kinds of ways do you interact with students in the program? How frequently? What interactions are required as part of your position / part of the program, and what is your own doing? (i.e. What is structured vs. what is informal or practitioner-motivated?)
4. How do you know, as a mentor, if a student is struggling? What does that look like?
5. How do you know, as a mentor, if a student is thriving? What does that look like?
6. What kind of challenges do you see your students encounter? How do you help them in those situations? Can you give me some specific examples?
7. What does a success story look like for you as a mentor? When do you feel like you have helped students? Any specific examples?
8. Program students talk a lot about the family of [Program A] and how it's motivating to be a part of that family. How do you think that feeling is established?
9. Program students also seem to be very aware of the resources that [Program A] and Seton Hall has to offer. How do you think that is accomplished?
10. Especially for at-risk students, there are many ideas about what contributes to a student's success or lack of success once he/she gets to college. In your opinion, and based on your own experiences, what are the most important factors that determine whether or not a student will 'make it' at an institution?
11. How do you think you as a mentor, influence those factors in a student's path?
12. Finally, thinking in broad terms, how would you describe your own philosophy and/or approach to mentoring at-risk college students? If you were to introduce someone brand new to your role as a mentor, what advice would you give them?



May 31, 2017

Elizabeth Hoehn

Dear Ms. Hoehn,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved as submitted under expedited review your research proposal entitled "Institutional Membership for Bridge Program Students: Fostering Meaningful Engagement". The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form, the stamped Recruitment Flyer, and the stamped original Consent Forms. Make copies only of these stamped forms..

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for you cooperation.

In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Eunyoung Kim

Office of Institutional Review Board

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