Benefits of Peer-Mentorship for Entry-Level Occupational Therapy Students: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract

Background: This study explored the benefits of a new peer-mentorship program designed for Master's-level occupational therapy students.

Method: This was a descriptive study of an entry-level Master's of occupational therapy (MOT) program. A group of entry-level MOT students participated in the program as mentees (n = 37 in summer 2019, n = 39 in fall 2019) and mentors (n = 9 in summer 2019, n = 8 in fall 2019) for two academic semesters. Feedback about the process and outcomes of the peer-mentorship program was collected at the end of each semester.

Results: The data showed that mentees reported the mentorship program helped them (a) acclimate to the occupational therapy program (89.19% in summer, 94.87% in fall), (b) promote their success in their occupational therapy program (89.19% in summer; 92.31% in fall), (c) help build self-confidence (72.98% in summer, 82.05% in fall), (d) improve communication skills (64.86% in summer, 69.24% in fall), and (e) reduce stress levels (78.38% in summer, 89.75% in fall). All mentors reported enhanced self-confidence and communication skills and enjoyed being part of the mentorship program.

Conclusion: The peer-mentorship program is a cost-effective and helpful tool for entry-level occupational therapy students. The program can help students be successful in their occupational therapy studies, navigate campus resources, reduce stress, build self-confidence, and improve their communication skills. With students' current mental health and academic challenges, such a program can benefit students' success and well-being. The program can be a resource for occupational therapy programs in building an alumni base and future fieldwork supervisors.

Comments
The authors declare that they have no competing financial, professional, or personal interest that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

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During their graduate studies, entry-level occupational therapy students can experience excessive stressors that may lead to anxiety, disengagement, and, eventually, academic burnout (Govender et al., 2015). Faculty members typically fill the role of mentors for students in occupational therapy educational programs. However, students can perceive peer support as more relevant given their "insider" perspective on graduate studies (Bhatti et al., 2020). In fact, in higher education, peers can significantly impact students' learning as they can act as peer leaders, peer coaches, advocates, and trusted advisors (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

Peer mentorship is a professional relationship where an experienced student helps a less experienced student by sharing information and providing advice and support (Falchikov, 2001). The benefits of peer mentorship in graduate studies have been explored in multiple disciplines (Lorenzetti et al., 2020). Previous research has shown that some benefits included enhanced self-directed learning and emotional support and developing leadership skills (Andersen & Wakins, 2018; Kramer et al., 2018). In a systematic review exploring the role of peer mentorship in graduate students, Lorenzetti et al. (2019) found positive effects in academic, social, psychological, and career areas of graduate learning. Similar findings were also reported in other professional disciplines. For example, Lorenzetti et al. (2020) conducted in-person interviews with 62 students recruited from education, medicine, nursing, and social work. Their findings indicated that peer mentorship promoted the development of learning environments, facilitated student access to essential knowledge, and helped them develop necessary academic and research skills.

The literature also provides an abundance of research studies on peer mentorship programs in engineering (Bhatti et al., 2020), business (Cornelius et al., 2016), medicine (Fournier & Tourian, 2020), and nursing (Andersen & Watkins, 2018; Miles et al., 2014). There is also evidence that peer mentorship programs were effective for specific academic and professional skills in health care disciplines. Examples include writing competence (Rohan & Fullerton, 2020) and therapeutic relationship skills in nursing students (Miles et al., 2014).

Although the literature has copious information on peer mentorship benefits in graduate studies in other disciplines, limited research was conducted in entry-level Master's occupational therapy programs (MOT). Those studies that examined occupational therapy included undergraduate students outside the United States (Milner & Bossers, 2004) and doctorate-level students (Norcross et al., 2020), investigated e-mentorship (Gafni-Lachter et al., 2021; Jacobs et al., 2016), or focused solely on fieldwork experiences (Cameron et al., 2016; Nolinske, 1995). MOT students can face multiple stressors during the first year of their graduate studies (Hutson et al., 2021). For example, most students enter the MOT program directly from undergraduate studies, making transitioning into graduate programs more demanding and independent learning much more stressful (Evans et al., 2018; Malek-Ismail, 2021). Many students move from their home or familiar environment to a new area or state with little or no social support (Evans et al., 2018; Malek-Ismail, 2021). In addition, most students start their MOT requirements with minimal work or professional experience, which makes engagement in leadership or clinical activities more stressful later in the MOT program. An effective formal peer mentorship program can help MOT students in various areas of graduate studies (Gafni-Latcher et al., 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to introduce and explore the benefits of a new formal peer mentorship program designed and implemented for MOT students.

Method

The Peer Mentorship Program

The 3-year occupational therapy program at the New York Institute of Tehnology developed and implemented a peer mentorship program to offer students the academic, professional, and social support they may need throughout their studies (Hutson et al., 2021; Schlemper, 2011). The program was designed to provide first-year students (mentees) with academic and professional support through peer mentors in the second and third years of the program. The mentorship program continued throughout the 3 years of the program. Upon graduating from the MOT program, the mentors will be asked to become mentor alumni and continue their role as mentors to their assigned mentees. As alumni mentors, they can help their mentees apply for the National Board Certification in Occupational Therapy Exam (NBCOT), licensure, job search, early job experience, and professional networking. The program was created by the principal investigator (PI), who was also the mentorship program coordinator.

Mentor Selection Process

A meeting was held to describe the peer mentorship program to the students who were in the final semester of their first year (i.e., potential mentors). The topics discussed during the meeting included the program process, intended outcomes, eligibility criteria, and required communication and interpersonal skills. Eligibility criteria for being a mentor were: (a) having a good academic standing in the MOT program with a cumulative GPA of ≥ 3.5, (b) availability to mentor three to five mentees, (c) ability to meet with mentees in person at least two to three times a semester, and (d) commitment to the program requirements for the entire MOT program (e.g., attending meetings and responding to mentees' emails). The students were excluded if they had a record of failing a course in the MOT program, stated that they were unavailable to meet with mentees, or were unable to commit to the program's requirements.

Interested students were invited to complete a mentor application questionnaire. A panel of three to four MOT faculty members blind-reviewed the mentor application questionnaires and used a scoring rubric to evaluate each questionnaire. The blind review helped eliminate any bias that could have influenced the mentor selection (e.g., previous faculty/student interactions and the student's racial, ethnic, or religious affiliation).

Ten students with the highest scores were selected as mentors. The selected mentors were required to attend two mentor training sessions to understand the basic expectations and responsibilities associated with the mentor role. The mentors had to review and accept a document listing the expectations and responsibilities for the mentorship program.

Training and Onboarding

The mentor program coordinator held an onboarding mentor training session in May. The coordinator provided a comprehensive overview of the program to familiarize the mentors with the program process and outcomes. The process included a timeline for the mentor-mentee formal meetings, responsibilities, time commitment, agreement contract, and the number of assigned mentees. Description of outcomes included program goals, benefits to mentors and mentees, mentor role expectations, and forms of support and guidance. The session also provided mentors with a structured mechanism to facilitate effective communication, including email templates, agenda, and the timeline for formal meetings, meeting frequencies, possible meeting locations, and virtual communication tools (e.g., Zoom links).

The training also involved structured role-play activities where mentors practice mock mentor-mentee sessions with real-life scenarios. The coordinator prepared 10 written scenarios for the role-play activities. The scenarios described common MOT student concerns, including group dynamics, grades, stress, anxiety, time management, fieldwork, friends and family, loneliness, dissatisfaction with a grade or instructor feedback, negative thinking, and an unpleasant living environment.

All mentors were instructed to contact the mentorship program coordinator regarding any mentees who expressed stress, depression, increasing anxiety, mental health concerns, or extreme personal challenges. The coordinator would refer those students to the campus Counseling and Wellness Center. The center provides free, confidential counseling services by trained professional staff members to provide strategies for stress management. All on-campus counseling services are confidential and free of charge. In addition, the Counseling and Wellness Center can provide referral services to specialized mental health care services if needed.

After completing the training session, the mentors were assigned their mentees, and the pairing continued throughout the MOT program. The mentors scheduled formal meetings with the mentees as per the guidelines provided in the training session. The coordinator sent regular reminders to the mentors to schedule upcoming or follow-up meetings with their mentees. They were also instructed to maintain communication with mentees between meetings when needed (e.g., text messages and email). The coordinator checked in with mentors regularly to collect informal feedback and provide advice when needed.

Participants

At the start of the first academic semester (summer 2019) of the MOT program, 37 students were assigned a mentor from the second-year cohort. Two additional mentees (i.e., n = 39) were added to the mentorship program in the fall 2019 semester. Ten students were initially selected as mentors. However, two mentors were excluded from the mentorship program because of their inability to meet the program requirements after being selected. All of the participants agreed to engage in the program and commit to its requirements. Each mentor (n = 8) was assigned three to five mentees.

Program Intended Outcomes

The mentors were expected to provide mentees with academic and professional advice, collegial support, and guidance in navigating campus resources, coursework, and other degree requirements. The mentors and mentees reported their experiences in the peer mentorship program using the questionnaires. The students could include their mentoring experience in their professional development portfolio, a graduation requirement that lists leadership and professional activities they participated in throughout the program.

Data Collection

Approval from the institutional review board was obtained to conduct a secondary data analysis of the feedback collected from the participants. The program started in the summer of 2019 and is planned to run regularly. This study uses data from the program's first run in the summer and and fall of 2019. Questionnaires were created (using SurveyMonkey) to collect data on the peer mentorship process and outcomes. The questionnaires were administered to the mentors-mentees at the end of each semester to collect feedback about their experiences.

After reviewing relevant literature on mentorship programs in higher education and in consultation with faculty members in the occupational therapy program, the PI created the questionnaire. Questions on

the survey focused on several aspects of the peer mentorship experience, including communication, satisfaction, and outcomes. For example, the mentors and mentees were asked for feedback about their assigned mentee-mentor, communication, interaction, satisfaction, and outcomes.

The mentee questionnaire included questions related to satisfaction with their assigned mentor (e.g., support and guidance, sharing ideas and insight, and valuable resource for information), mentor-mentee interactions (e.g., expressing your thoughts and ideas with the mentor, asking questions, promoting success, and approachable), and the mentorship program (e.g., perceived improvement in self-confidence, communication skills, acclimate to the occupational therapy program, and reduce my stress level). The mentor questionnaire included questions related to communication (e.g., willing to ask questions, willing to share concerns), interaction (e.g., comfortable expressing thoughts and ideas, ability to answer questions and provide advice to the mentees), and building professional skills (e.g., self-confidence, communications skills, mentorship).

Most of the questions used a Likert scale response with 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral* (neither agree, nor disagree), 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*. In addition, the survey included several open-ended questions directed to the mentors and mentees that inquired about any negative experiences while interacting with their mentor-mentee, suggested changes to the peer mentorship program, least favorite aspects of the mentorship program, and any additional comments regarding their experience while participating in the program. Based on the students' feedback, some items in the questionnaire were modified, and the updated items were added to the fall survey.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics gathered via SurveyMonkey were used to report the quantitative data, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the open-ended questions. We also completed a thematic analysis of the data collected from the open-ended questions in the survey. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to identifying patterns across qualitative data collected from participants (Portney, 2020). The co-author and two trained research assistants completed the thematic analysis. The readers thoroughly reviewed all textual data and coded the responses independently. The coding process started with open coding, whereby the readers systematically identified keywords or phrases frequently used by the participants to describe their experience (e.g., stress, stressed out, anxious, nervous). We then organized these clusters into larger or broader categories (i.e., axial coding) that described the common words or patterns (e.g., stress and anxiety; Creswell, 2014). The themes were then compared and refined until the patterns were cohesive and agreement was reached between the readers (Creswell, 2014). The analysis process was thoroughly documented, including the emergence of themes, refinement, and consensus among the readers.

Although trustworthiness can be established at several levels (e.g., credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability), we used a few techniques relevant to the design of our study and the data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, through triangulation (i.e., to ensure confirmability), the emerged themes were compared with different sources of information, such as feedback collected outside the survey (e.g., conversations with students, compliance with the scheduled meetings, and input communicated with other faculty in the program). Member checking was also used to enhance confirmability whereby the PI shares the preliminary emerged themes with the study participants to offer validation or feedback on the credibility of the findings. To ensure dependability (i.e., stability of the data over the study duration over several semesters), the PI also kept an audit trail of data collection and

analysis processes throughout the study. The co-PI reviewed that timeline and audit trail to ensure consistency of data collection (e.g., when survey questions were edited for clarity).

Results

Although the peer mentorship program is ongoing, this study explored preliminary data collected in the summer and fall of 2019. The participants included the mentors (n = 9 in summer; n = 8 in fall) and mentees (n = 37 in summer; n = 39 in fall). The mean age of the mentors was 24.11 years ($\pm$1.9) in summer and 24.38 years ($\pm$2.2) in fall. The mean age of the mentees was 22.9 years ($\pm$1.1) in summer and 23.28 years ($\pm$1.57) in fall. The majority of the participants in the program were females (female mentors n = 9 [100%] in summer; n = 8 (100%) in fall; female mentees n = 34 [91.89%] in summer; n = 36 [92.31%] in fall). The expected graduation year was 2021 for the mentors and 2022 for the mentees. Most of the mentees met with their mentors in person two to three times in the summer (n = 34, 91.89%) and one to two times (n = 32, 82.06%) in the fall. Meetings were held virtually when needed. Meetings lasted, on average, between 11–30 min in summer (n = 31, 83.79%) and fall (n = 31, 83.79%) with a few lasting over 30 min (n = 6, 16.22% in summer; n = 7, 17.95% in fall).

Mentee's Responses and Feedback

The mentees described their satisfaction with the program process, logistics, outcomes, and assigned mentor as follows.

Program Process and Logistics

All of the mentees met with their mentors at the scheduled times and were pleased with the time allocated for the meetings. The mentees thought that email communication was done promptly in the summer (i.e., within 48 hr) (n = 35, 94.6%). The majority of the mentees were comfortable with the meeting locations (i.e., mainly on campus) in the summer (n = 36, 97.3%) and fall (n = 38, 97.43%). The mentees were pleased with the number of meetings with their mentors (n = 33, 89.19% in summer). Many mentees felt comfortable continuing with the same mentor in future semesters (n = 31, 83.78% in summer; n = 36, 92.31% in fall). Additional data from the fall semester showed that the mentees reported the top three topics discussed during the meetings with their mentors were exams (n = 24, 63.16%), test prep techniques (n = 26, 66.67%), and course content (n = 22, 56.41%).

Program Outcomes

The majority of the mentees agreed that they received support and guidance from their mentors (n = 34, 91.89% in summer; n = 37, 94.87% in fall), felt comfortable asking questions (n = 36, 97.29% in summer; n = 38, 97.43% in fall), and felt comfortable interacting and sharing ideas with their mentors (n = 35, 94.59% in summer; n = 38, 97.43% in fall). In addition, most of the mentees felt that the peer mentorship program promoted their success in their occupational therapy studies (n = 33, 89.19% in summer; n = 36, 92.31% in fall). The participants also thought the program helped to build their self-confidence (n = 27, 72.98% in summer; n = 32, 82.05% in fall), improve their communication skills (n = 24, 64.86% in summer; n = 27, 69.24% in fall), acclimate them to the occupational therapy program (n = 33, 89.19% in summer; n = 37, 94.87% in fall), enhance their well-being (n = 24, 64.86% in summer), and reduce their stress level (n = 29, 78.38% in summer; n = 35, 89.75% in fall). However, the mentees felt less strongly about the ability of the program to help them participate in professional and leadership activities (n = 14, 37.38% in summer).

Assigned Mentors

Most of the mentees thought that their mentors acted as a good role model (n = 28, 75.68% in summer; n = 33, 84.62% in fall), were good communicators (n = 33, 89.19% in summer; n = 37, 94.87% in fall), and were open to sharing ideas (n = 35, 94.59% in summer; n = 38, 97.43% in fall). In addition, most mentees found that their mentors were good and empathetic listeners (n = 35, 94.59% in summer; n = 37, 94.87% in fall), responsive to their questions (n = 35, 94.59% in summer), a valuable resource of information (n = 34, 91.89% in summer; n = 37, 94.87% in fall), approachable (n = 34, 91.89% in summer; n = 37 94.87% in fall), and motivating (n = 36, 97.29% in summer; n = 35, 89.74% in fall). Over half expressed an interest in becoming a future mentor in the peer mentorship program (n = 25, 67.57% in summer; n = 20, 51.28% in fall).

Benefits of the Peer Mentorship Program

During the data analysis of the open-ended questions on the benefits of the peer mentorship program, the following themes emerged from the mentees' responses over both semesters.

Transition into the Occupational Therapy Program. The mentees described that the mentorship program was helpful in the transition into a new graduate-level program and adjusting to the expectations of graduate studies. One mentee stated, "The program helped me during my first semester because it's a big change from undergrad, so it was nice talking to someone who already went through it."

Support and Guidance by Mentors. The mentees shared positive feedback on the support provided by the mentors. One mentee shared, "[My mentor] did an amazing job with making me feel comfortable and provided me with the best insight and guidance to make sure I did well in my first semester of occupational therapy school."

Preparation and Navigating the Occupational Therapy Program. The mentees described how their mentors helped them prepare for classes and understand program outcomes and expectations. One mentee stated, "It was comforting to feel more prepared for classes and program expectations with the help of my mentor's insight."

Favorite Aspects. The mentees shared common favorite elements of the program. These included the relatable experiences by the mentors that helped mentees boost their self-confidence, prepare for academic requirements, and reduce their stress levels. One mentee stated, "There was someone to help me during a new experience of a difficult semester."

Mentors Responses and Feedback

The majority of mentors had five assigned mentees (n = 7, 87.5% in fall) and met formally with their mentees in person or virtually at least two to three times (n = 8, 88.9%) in summer and one time in fall (n = 8, 100%) for at least 15–30 min each time (n = 7, 77.78% in summer; n = 5, 62.5% in fall). In addition, mentees reached out to their mentors on an as-needed basis via text, email, phone, etc. All mentors (n = 8, 100%) enjoyed the experience in the program, thought that their mentees were willing to share concerns and ask questions, felt comfortable interacting with their assigned mentees, and were able to answer their mentees' questions. In addition, all mentors reported meeting with their mentees at the scheduled times and were happy with the meeting durations. The majority of the mentors felt that the program helped build their self-confidence (n = 7, 77.8% in summer; n = 7, 87.50% in fall) and improved their communication skills (100%). The mentors reported that the top three items discussed during the meetings with their mentees were exams (n = 6, 75%), test prep techniques (n = 4, 50%), and course content (n = 3, 34.5%). Additional survey questions in the fall showed that all mentors felt that the mentor

program was helpful to the mentees, promoted their professional growth, and helped them prepare for entering the workforce.

Qualitative data analysis of the mentors' feedback revealed the following common themes about the benefits gained from the peer mentorship program.

Helping Other Students

The most reported benefit was that mentors felt they could help and guide mentees navigate the new academic program and transition into the new role of being a graduate student. One comment shared by a mentor was, "I like to think I have made a difference in helping the new students transition into this program."

A Sense of Accomplishment

Mentors felt a sense of accomplishment by offering guidance and advice to mentees. One mentor shared, "I loved how it was so easy to talk to my mentees, and I felt a sense of achievement by helping them out even in the tiny way possible."

Connecting to Other Students

The mentors described the rewarding benefits of connecting with students in the other cohorts in the MOT program. One mentor commented, "I really enjoyed getting to know each and every one of my mentees."

Better Communication Skills. The mentors felt that the program helped them build their communication skills by interacting with mentees and sharing advice on important student matters. One mentor shared, "It helped me gain self-confidence and enhance my communication skills."

Although the participants shared positive feedback on all aspects of the program, a few suggestions were made, including reducing the number of face-face meetings because of commuting issues, group mentoring, and the ability to pick a mentor (i.e., matching).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the benefits of the peer mentorship program offered to entry-level MOT students. Although limited research is available on peer mentorship programs at the MOT level, our findings align with previous research investigating peer mentorship at the graduate level (e.g., e-mentorship programs for doctoral students). Similar to previous research (Andersen & Wakins, 2018; Kramer et al., 2018; Lorenzetti et al., 2019; Lorenzetti, 2020; Malek-Ismail & Krajnik, 2018), our findings indicate the supportive role of the peer mentorship program for graduate students. The data showed positive feedback about the program's process, outcomes, and benefits.

Unlike other peer mentorship programs described in previous research, our program was conducted in person (rather than virtual; Gafni-Lachter et al., 2021; Jacobs et al., 2016) and included MOT students (rather than undergraduate; Milner & Bossers, 2004, or doctoral students; Norcross et al., 2020). The peer mentorship described in this study had the following key benefits for the MOT students.

Transition

The mentees in this study reported positive feedback on how the peer mentorship program facilitated their transition into the new role of a graduate student. The literature suggests that peer and social support in the first year of graduate studies can enhance student success and retention (Boehm et al., 2017). Research also shows that first-year students may experience changes in occupational roles and routines, in addition to academic stressors (Malek-Ismail & Krajnik, 2016). This may increase the need for initiatives that enhance MOT students' well-being during the transition (Lambdin-Pattavina et al.,

2021). In addition, our findings showed that the peer mentorship program helped the mentees navigate the requirements of the MOT program, which alleviated the stress and anxiety typically experienced by new MOT students (Malek-Ismail & Krajnik, 2018).

Continuity of the Peer Mentorship Program

The continuity of this program lends the students the ongoing support that they may need at critical times (e.g., tests, assignments, end of semester projects) after being enrolled (or "oriented") in the new MOT graduate program. Early events offered by most MOT onboarding programs (e.g., orientation to new students) do not have the same continuity that can help students throughout the MOT program.

Structure

The structure created in this mentorship program (e.g., number of meetings, assignment of mentors) makes the support more attainable by ensuring a clear means of communication between mentors and mentees. In addition, because the mentees and mentors are expected to provide feedback on the mentorship program, both parties are more accountable and mindful of the process and achieved outcomes. The onboarding training where students role-play realistic mentor-mentee scenarios helped the mentors prepare for the role and provide thoughtful advice.

Peers

Students trust other students knowing that they are held to the same expectations in their graduate studies. Students need to hear success stories from other students, explaining why peer support may be more relatable than faculty support provided during academic advising (Bhatti et al., 2020).

Consistency

The mentors were assigned to the same mentees throughout the MOT program, providing a consistent mentorship experience. This consistency also helped mentors maintain a record of mentees' academic experience, which built a more insightful mentorship process and a smoother transition between semesters.

Mental Health

Our findings showed that the peer mentorship program helped reduce anxiety and stress among the participating students. Previous research shows that starting a graduate program can cause high levels of stress and anxiety among graduate students (Evans et al., 2018; Malek-Ismail & Krajnik, 2018). Having peer support can improve students' well-being at an early stage of the MOT program.

Leadership

The thematic analysis showed that mentors found the program enjoyable and rewarding. This sense of professional satisfaction may encourage the students to engage in future professional and leadership activities (Ruland & Lachter, 2015). Considering the call of Vision 2025 to create influential leaders in the profession (AOTA, 2017; Stoffel, 2014), engaging the students in mentorship roles can offer early leadership opportunities while under the guidance of faculty. This makes the experience even more rewarding and less stressful for mentees and mentors.

In addition, the mentorship program is a resource for building a future fieldwork educator and alumni network. Graduating mentors continue to mentor students after completing the MOT program. The peer mentorship program can facilitate communication with future fieldwork educators and alumni networks. The students may continue to feel a sense of collegial responsibility or moral commitment to their peers, school, and academic institution. In addition, many MOT graduates will have the opportunity to supervise students at some point in their careers. Therefore, by building a strong alumni base, MOT

programs implementing this peer mentorship may build a diversified network of future fieldwork supervisors for their prospective students.

The peer mentorship program is free to all students and requires no financial cost from the MOT program side. Hence, the program is cost-effective and sustainable in the long term.

Limitations and Future Research

There are a few limitations to this study. First, the sample size in our study was relatively small because we used data from two semesters only. We plan to collect data from a larger sample in future studies to explore the challenges of applying the program to a larger cohort. Second, with the pause on in-person education because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the peer mentorship program switched to virtual in 2020. Data collected during remote learning may reflect student concerns different from those found in our research. Therefore, future data analysis should investigate differences between the two modes of interaction during the mentorship process. Finally, pairings of mentors and mentees were done randomly in this study to minimize selection bias. However, future research should explore the benefits of the mentorship programs where mentors and mentees are matched based on a number of criteria, such as personal or research interests, life goals, academic status, or residence.

It is noteworthy that the findings showed a small impact of the peer mentorship program on mentees' engagement in professional activities. One explanation may be that the students are mainly concerned with navigating through the first year of the MOT program rather than professional activities. Since our study collected data during the first two semesters of the MOT program, future data can be collected from alumni on potential modifications to maximize the benefits of the mentorship program. In addition, other support aspects may be explored in future data collection, such as peer support during times of community-level crises (e.g., COVID-19, social movements, or unrest).

In conclusion, peer mentorship can be a successful initiative to support students' transition while building communication skills, self-confidence, and overall success in the occupational therapy program.

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