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### The Importance of Faculty Mentorship in Higher Education

Ashley Martinez

*Texas A&M University-San Antonio*

Rafika Islam

*Texas A&M University-San Antonio*

Julianne Ramirez

*Texas A&M University-San Antonio*

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# The Importance of Faculty Mentorship in Higher Education

By Ashley Martinez, Rafika Islam, and Julianne Ramirez

Faculty Sponsor: Myrna A. Garza  
Texas A&M University-San Antonio



## Introduction

A goal that many institutions have is to create an environment in which students of all backgrounds can succeed and have the tools to accomplish their aspirations. In the transition from high school to college, students experience a wide range of trials, which can differ between the backgrounds and identities of students, yet typically result in a similar outcome in perceived and experienced stress (Huynh et al., 2023).

Faculty mentorship can impact a student's academic performance and career exploration in higher education by providing a personalized experience in which students of all backgrounds can feel empowered and supported in their academic journey (Huynh et al., 2023). Recognizing the challenges first-year students face and the benefits of personalized mentorship, the Office of First-Year Experience created the Faculty Advising Program in the Fall of 2019. With varying outreach methods, focus, and engagement, the program's main goal is to ensure that every student that chooses to participate has equal access to the support and tools they need to feel a sense of belonging and succeed academically. This program connects to the mission of the Office of First-Year Experience in supporting the transition and development of students throughout their first year on campus. Specifically, the Faculty Advising Program encourages students to engage with their faculty mentor bi-monthly throughout their first year. Each faculty mentor is matched with 4-5 mentees and group meetings are highly encouraged. Interactions range in modality; coffee chats, lunches, virtual calls, emails, and outings in the community. The goal is that these personalized interactions support students' wellbeing and growth, as well as provide a humanized view of the faculty. Survey data has been collected every semester the program has been in existence to track the impact and gather feedback.

## Research Question and Hypothesis

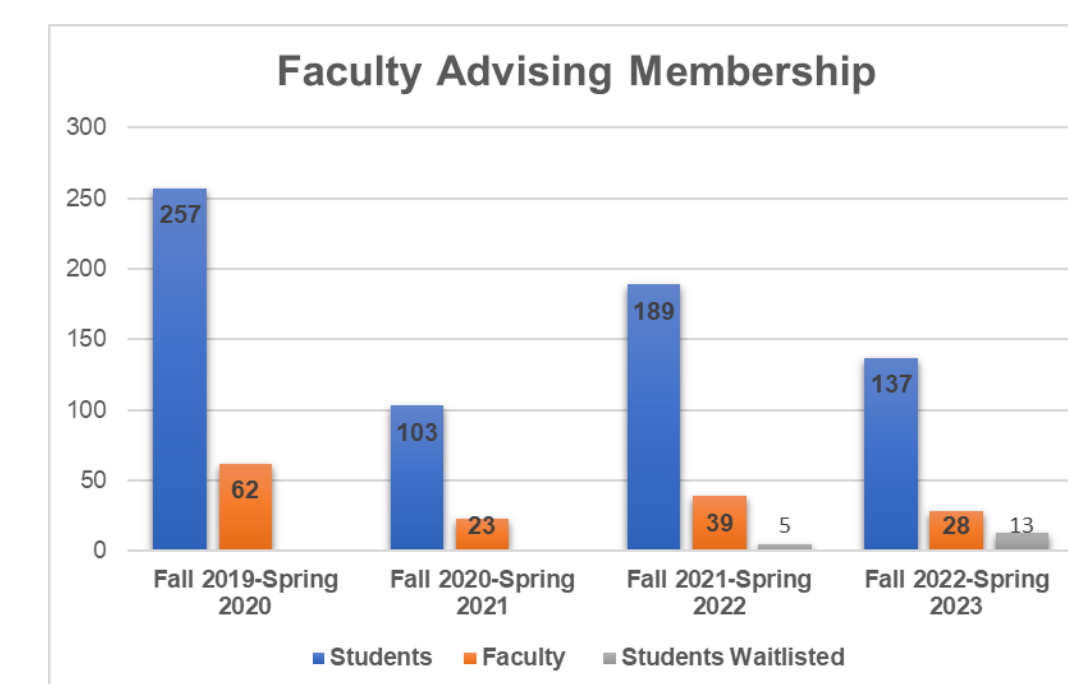
Does faculty mentorship influence student's sense of belonging at Texas A&M University-San Antonio?

Texas A&M University-San Antonio students will benefit from having a faculty mentor during their first year as a college student because they will feel connected to the institution.

## Method

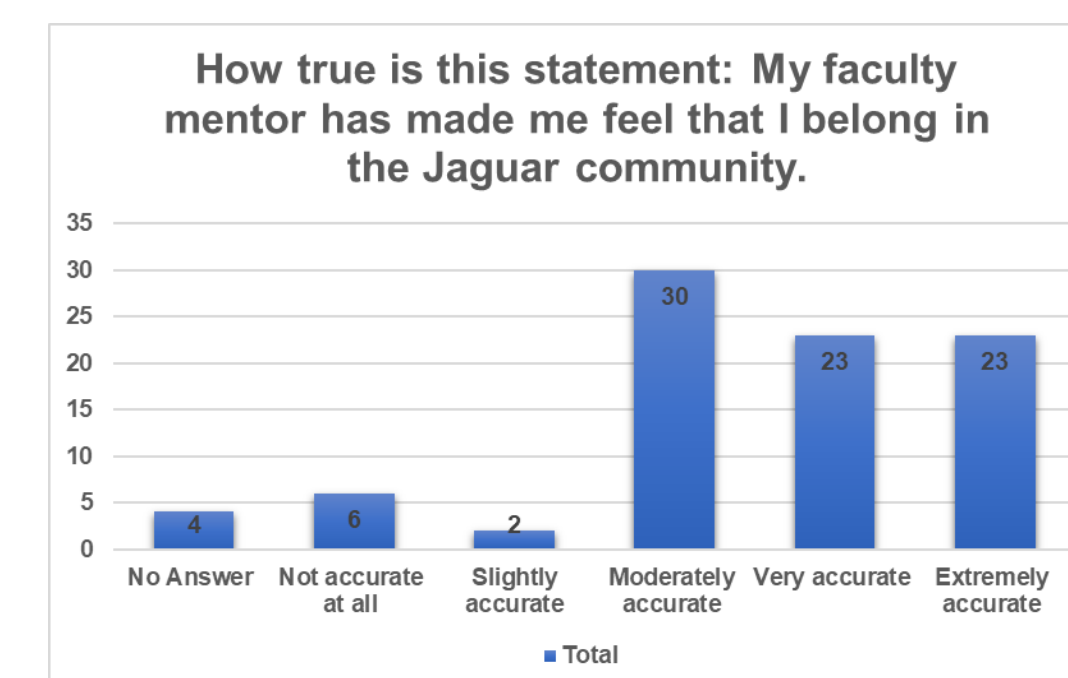
The Faculty Advising Program started in the Fall of 2019 and has welcomed a new cohort every academic year since. Each semester, assessments were sent out to all participants through the online questionnaire platforms, Qualtrics and JagSync. Questions assessed engagement, support, and overall experience in the program through a Likert scale, checklist, and open response questions. Faculty and students received reminders to fill out the assessment through emails, text messages, and at the End of Semester Celebrations. The goal of the assessment was to gather what impact faculty mentors had on a student during their first year as a college student and to get feedback on how the program could improve. Results were analyzed to report patterns and themes in the student and faculty experience. While the data is from both faculty and students, the discussion primarily focuses on a student's point of view.

## Results

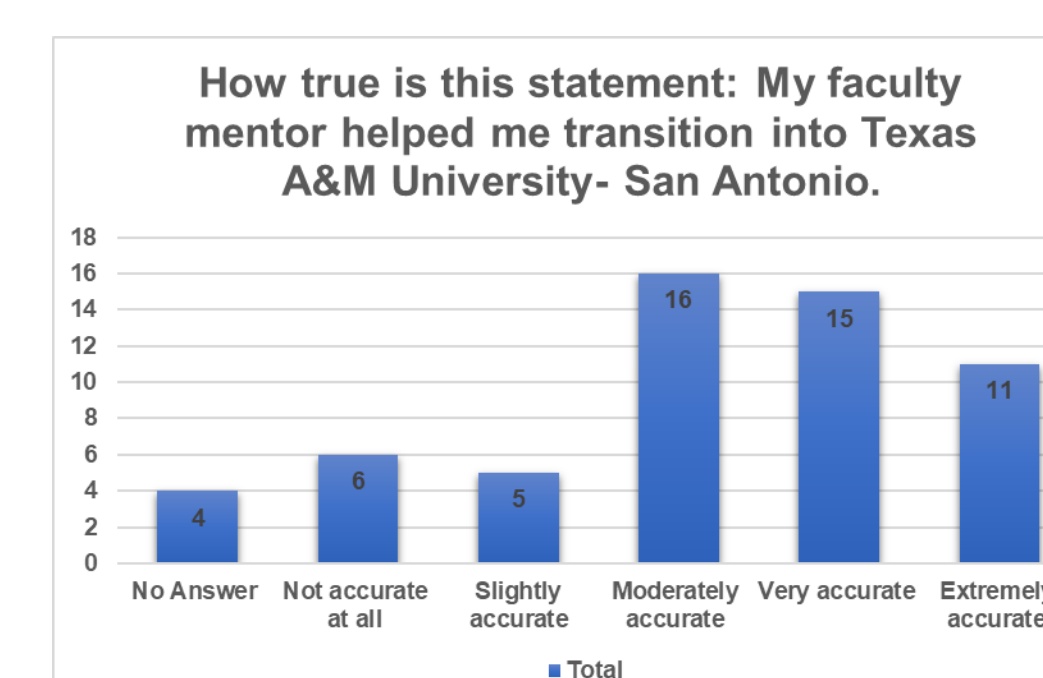


### Focuses on the membership and participants.

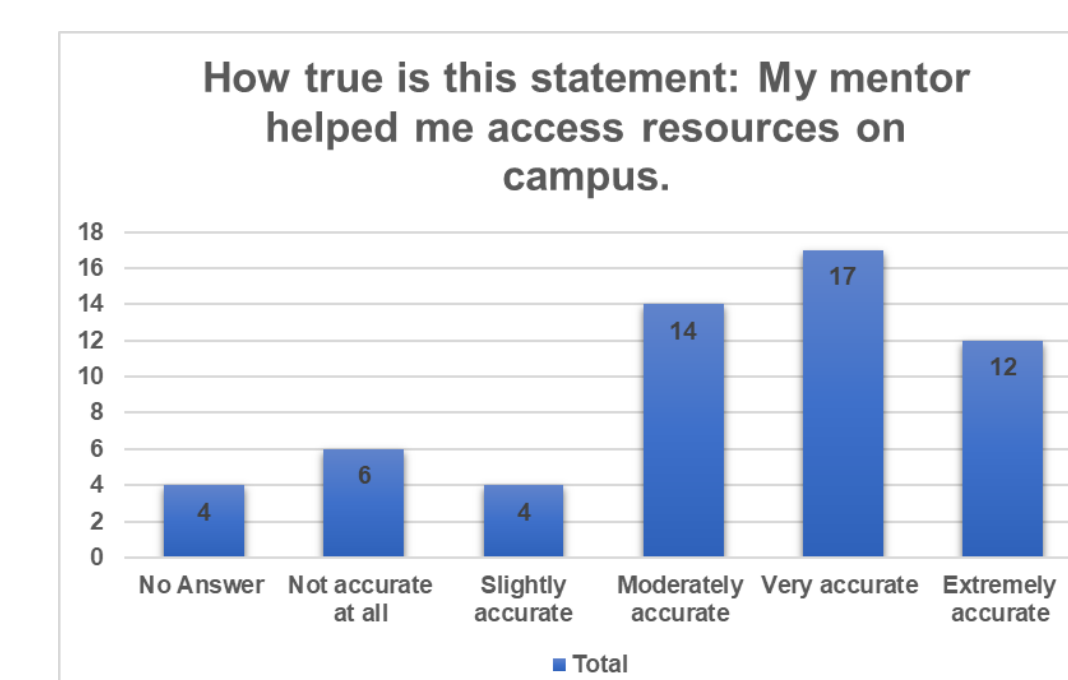
In the first year of the program, students were opted into it based on high school GPA. The following years, students have chosen to participate. In Fall 2021 and Fall 2022, the marketing of the program had to be concluded earlier than expected because student interest surpassed the available faculty mentors. The data highlights the need for more faculty to meet the number of interested students, as reflected by the creation of a waitlist. There is interest from first-year students for faculty mentorship, however, with such a small campus population the need is not able to be met.



Data collected from Fall 2019 to Fall 2022. This statement is the most consistent and prominent question asked throughout all four years of the program. **76 students** reported that having a faculty mentor on campus helped them feel like a part of the campus community.



Data collected from Fall 2021 to Fall 2022. Prior to these semesters, this question was not included. **More than half the students** who completed the assessment form indicated that they positively feel that their faculty mentor helped them transition into the institution.



Data collected from Spring 2021 to Fall 2022. Prior to these semesters, this question was not included. **More than half the students** who completed this question reported they felt that their faculty mentor connected them to resources on campus.

Common themes found in the open-response submissions from mentees:

- Busy with other commitments
- Intimidated by mentor
- Not interested in additional support
- Faculty response rate
- Faculty were not interactive enough
- Forgetting they were part of the program

### Why did you not engage with your faculty mentor at all or consistently?

### Summary of Results

- Receiving feedback from students was a challenge, however, with the data gathered, it can be concluded that students who interacted with their faculty mentor, have been able to have a smooth transition into college, feel a part of the Jaguar community, and have been assisted with resources for college success.
- The number of faculty mentors willingly available for the program does not meet the demand of mentee numbers. The volunteer component can heavily influence how successful the mentor and mentee relationship can be.
- Some mentees reported negative experiences with the program, which is highly influenced by lack of engagement from their faculty mentor.
- Some students who did not engage with their mentor filled out the survey. They did not participate because of reasons like being too busy, forgetting about being part of the program, and not connecting with the mentor.

## Limitations

- Although 685 mentees have been part of the program, only 104 students submitted assessments forms.
- The data that was collected was not gathered for research purposes, but to receive feedback to improve the program and gauge the impact of the mentorship. Because of this, questions were catered to the areas that the team needed feedback on which created inconsistencies.

## Discussion

The experiences and data behind this program suggest that having a mentor in a time of transition, stress, and vulnerability, helps students feel connected to the institution. Based on the results, if students met with their faculty mentor consistently, they were more likely to feel they had someone supporting them at A&M-SA. When a mentor or mentee failed to demonstrate a certain level of engagement or became less available throughout the semester, their counterpart would become dissatisfied with the program. As evidenced by the demand for faculty participation, students are interested in participating in programs such as the Faculty Advising Program. However, they are struggling to utilize this resource appropriately. That lack of engagement is only further emphasized by the need for more responses to the assessments, an issue reoccurring throughout the program's years. **There is no doubt that faculty mentorship supports students' sense of belonging; what must be addressed is how to get students to use this faculty resource.**

### Recommendations:

- Provide a tracking system in which mentees will keep record of each interaction with their mentor to receive a signature and be rewarded with an incentive like a small scholarship, graduation stole, or textbook fund.
  - Create a program that is phrased less as a volunteer program so that a mandatory system of meetings can be put into place.
- Utilize support groups such as First-Year Seminar, JagX, and Success Coaches to create higher awareness on the impact of faculty mentorship.
  - Within First-Year Seminar integrate a lesson where students work in creating questions and topics that they will use during office hours for each of their classes.
- Encourage all faculty that teach first-year students to include an assignment focused on students stopping by during their office hours. Ideally, this would help diminish intimidation of interacting with faculty.
- Although the Faculty Advising Program itself does not have consistent data to present regarding GPA, a study conducted on similar mentorship programs found participants had a higher GPA. by an average of 0.16 (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). More data needs to be gathered to see the impact of GPA for students that are part of mentorship programs on campus, and this can be used to market the benefits of mentorship to students.

## References

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