Who is your Most Influential Mentor?

Photo: Wynn Canyon, NM, Summer 1999
Millennials ...

will outnumber “Boomers” by 22 million in 2030 (New Media Marketing, 2015)
Introduction

- Today’s undergraduate students are labeled one of the most “lost” generations (Elmore & Maxwell, 2008).

- Understanding when and where students seek guidance could help educators create more intentional, individualized programs for each student (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

- Understanding how students seek mentorship leads to a desire for additional research (Pascarella, 2006).

Photo: OSU Agricultural Communications Services, 2014
Problem Statement

- More than 70 percent of Americans will attend a four-year college, but less than two-thirds will graduate (Porter, 2013).

- The first year is labeled as the most critical year for ensuring student retention in college programs (Yorke & Longden, 2004).

- One theory to motivating first-year college students to become engaged citizens and leaders is through the use of personal mentors (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).
Purpose

- Describe first-semester students’ perceptions of their personal mentorship relationships.

- Focused at the beginning and end of the Fall 2014 AG 1011 – Freshmen Orientation class in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at Oklahoma State University.

Photo: OSU Agricultural Communications Services, 2014
Research Objectives

1. Describe the selected characteristics (age, sex, and ethnicity) of incoming students in the Fall 2014 CASNR AG 1011 – Freshmen Orientation course.

2. Describe incoming students’ classification of most influential mentors at the beginning and end of the Fall 2014 AG 1011 course.
The value of mentoring has long been recognized in practice, as well as, in research (Cohen, 1993).

Hundreds of formalized programs and institutional practices include a mentoring component (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Positive mentorship builds undergraduate motivation by stressing the value of the experience, contributing to academic goals, and encouraging engagement (Snowden & Hardy, 2012).
Theoretical Framework: Theory of Servant Leadership

- “Servant first, leader second” (Greenleaf, 1977).

- Servant leadership theory is mostly conceptual and anecdotal (Russell & Stone, 2002).

- Used Van Dierendonck & Nuijten’s Approach - combined leader and servant into one measure (2011).
Methodology

- Longitudinal, panel survey design with a census approach (Creswell, 2012).
  - Pre- and post-questionnaire administration.

- Researcher-designed general mentorship and demographic inventory questionnaire (Kimmelshue, 2012; Cramer, 2013).

Validity:
- A panel of 15 experts were hand-selected to assess face and content validity of the researcher-designed questionnaire (Leeuw, Hox, & Dillman, 2008).
Methodology

- **Population:**
  - Incoming first-semester students enrolled in the Fall 2014 CASNR AG 1011 – Freshmen Orientation ($N = 485$).

- **Response Rate:**
  - 436 students ($n = 485$) completed the pre-questionnaire = **89.9% response rate**.
  - 404 students ($n = 485$) completed the post-questionnaire = **83.3% response rate**.
Findings

Objective 1: Personal Characteristics
Age & Sex

- The mean age of respondents was 18.2 \( (SD = .76) \) where 369 students (84.6%) were 18 years old at the point of completing the pre-questionnaire.

- The population consisted of 127 (29.1%) males and 306 (70.2%) females.
## Findings

### Objective 1: Personal Characteristics

### Racial or Ethnic Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial or Ethnic Group</th>
<th>$f$</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>83.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native American or Native Alaskan</td>
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<td>6.3</td>
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<td>Latino or Hispanic</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>African-American (Non-Hispanic)</td>
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<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions & Implications

Objective 1: Personal Characteristics

- The typical respondent was an 18-year-old, Caucasian (non-Hispanic) female.
  - Focus additional efforts on ethnic and gender-related diversity in Land Grant universities.

- Mentorship provides value in engaging students on campus.
  - When students feel connected to the mission of the college, they recognize the need for their education, which could boost enrollment numbers and maintains retention.
Findings

Objective 2: Classification of Influential Mentors

Mentor Type

- Parent
- Teacher
- Club/Organization Advisor
- Athletic Coach
- Student/Peer
- Religious/Church Leader
- Sibling
- Boss/Manager
- Other
- No Mentor

Percentage (%)

Pre-Questionnaire: 51.3%
Post-Questionnaire: 48.5%
Findings

Objective 2: Classification of Influential Mentors

- Changed Mentor – $f = 132, 30%$
- Did Not Change Mentor – $f = 263, 60%$
- No Response – $f = 41, 10%$
Conclusions & Implications

Objective 2: Classification of Influential Mentors

- Elmore and Maxwell (2008) highlighted students enter higher educational institutions with closer parent-to-student relationships than generations before.

- Roughly one-third of students (30%) changed their mentor classification between the pre- and post-questionnaires. The greatest increase (+6.2%) were student or peer mentors.
  - What are the main reasons students adjust in the first-eight weeks?

- Students who seek active mentorship establish connections build interpersonal and communication skills (Ensheer & Murphy, 2005).
Recommendations

1. Incorporate purposeful peer mentor programs within first-semester collegiate retention efforts.

1. Once peer mentor programs are in place, evaluate if a relationship exists between organized mentorship efforts and freshmen retention data.

1. Target parental audiences for marketing student success and peer support efforts for recruitment endeavors.

Photo: OSU Agricultural Communications Services, 2014
Discussion

- Incorporating intentional mentorship programs early in students’ college experience could be a reinforcing link for retaining Millennial college students.

- Mentorship focuses on building leadership in life rather than just leaders in the classroom.
  - How do students respond to different mentors?
  - Relationship in a long-term study?
  - GenX?

- The time to invest in tomorrow’s leaders has never been more prevalent (Levine & Dean, 2012).