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JOURNAL OF COLLEGE ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMS

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>
> Angela Waltrip, Lee University

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How to utilize student success workshops to increase retention

Title IX Training

CASE STUDY

Johnston Community College (JCC) was looking for a way to continue to support students online post-orientation. Aligning with their goals of "enhancing the student experience and enhancing student success," it was critically important that students have access to support resources 24/7 and that those resources reinforced active learning principles. Utilizing StudentLingo workshops, JCC is able to extend orientation into their FYE program which has helped overall retention efforts.

JCC selected a wide range of workshops, including Classroom Expectations, Developing Cross Cultural Skills, Academic Integrity, and Title IX. Implementing StudentLingo in a very intentional way. students access the workshops through their online orientation site. Faculty have been given the option to parallel the workshops with academic courses such as pairing StudentLingo with their ACA College Student Success course and other support areas on campus.

The **StudentLingo** experience lays the foundation for college success, retention & persistence at Johnston Community College.

> " StudentLingo is helping students by giving them a resource that they can access 24/7. If they are up late at night and the college is closed, they can find the information they are looking for. "

Kendra Arnold
Coordinator of Recruiting and Communications

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- Community College
- 5,000+ enrolled
- One of the fastest growing counties in the state

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CHALLENGES RESOLVED

- Provide additional online student success resources
- Extend orientation programming into the first year experience
- Meet Title IX educational compliance

KEY STATS

➡ 9 workshops

➡ Over 17,000 content views

➡ 93% completion rate

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FOREWORD

Welcome to our latest issue of the *Journal of College Academic Support Programs* (*J-CASP*), and thank you for your readership. No matter your role in the field of college academic support, you are certain to find something of interest in this issue with its three juried feature research articles, two exploratory essays (non-juried), and an interview with one of the field's most innovative academic support leaders.

In our first feature article, Dr. Michelle Cook and Dr. Elizabeth Hughes describe their research on a phonologically-based reading intervention for undergraduate English Language Learners who identified themselves as at-risk for reading difficulties. In our second feature article, Dr. Rebecca Cofer collects and analyzes reflections from peer educators on their tutoring and teaching experiences. In our third feature article, Dr. Timothy Nelson examines how participation in a student volunteer experience affected former developmental education reading students' sense of belonging in the academic community, self-confidence in leadership, and likelihood to volunteer in future service activity.

For our latest *J-CASP* Conversations, *J-CASP* editorial staff Jonathan Lollar and Camrie Pipper interviewed Curtiss Stevens, executive dean of the ACCelerator and strategic initiative, about Austin Community College's innovative learning space called the ACCelerator. The ACCelerator is one of the largest state-of-the-art community college teaching and technology learning centers. Stevens describes the ACCelerator's guiding principles and services and shares how students have benefited from the college's holistic, student-centered approach to increasing student success.

We end our issue with two exploratory essays, both of interest to faculty and staff who wish to promote student success. Dr. Selva-Rodriguez and her co-authors outline a trauma-informed approach to encourage ethnically diverse students to seek learning assistance. Dr. Virtue and her co-authors advocate for an equity-based framework for student academic support that involves the identification of deficit-based beliefs and practices and the adoption of the asset-based belief that every student has potential.

The authors and the interviewee in this issue include faculty and staff members at two community colleges (Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College and Austin Community College) and 11 universities (American University, Dartmouth College, Elon University, Georgia College & State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Mount St. Mary's University, Penn State; Penn State Behrend; Texas State University, Tufts University, and Western Carolina University).

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the *J-CASP* as a co-editor, associate editor, editorial assistant, reviewer, author, and/or reader.

Denise Guckert, EdD, *J-CASP* Co-Editor

Russ Hodges, EdD, *J-CASP* Co-Editor

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FEATURE ARTICLE

A Phonologically Based Reading Intervention for Undergraduate English Language Learners At-Risk of Reading Difficulties: A Pilot Study

Michelle J. Cook, *School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College*
Elizabeth M. Hughes, *Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education, The Pennsylvania State University*

ABSTRACT

Researchers have reported that English language learners (ELLs) may be at risk of reading difficulties in the postsecondary setting. Although some students may only require explicit content-related vocabulary instruction and support with comprehension strategies in order to enhance comprehension, others may benefit from targeted short-term intervention in foundational reading skills. In this study, we examined whether a phonologically based reading intervention for undergraduate ELLs at-risk of reading difficulties would result in significant between-group differences for the proximal variables of decoding and sight word recognition and the distal variable of reading comprehension. This pilot quasi-experimental group design study involved 9 participants (treatment = 6/control = 3) from various L1 backgrounds, including Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic. Effect sizes were calculated for the proximal variables using measures of word attack and letter-word identification, and the distal variable based on a measure of passage comprehension. Although a small and small-medium effect were calculated for the measures of word attack and letter-word identification, respectively, no effect was found for the measure of passage comprehension. Implications related to intervention dosage and additional intervention components are discussed.

Keywords: phonologically based reading program, reading comprehension, English language learners, undergraduate

Reading comprehension is a pivotal skill for all students. Students who become competent readers have access to content knowledge (Carnine & Carnine, 2004; Vaughn et al., 2019) and are better positioned to succeed academically (Hammer et al., 2014; Klass et al., 2020). Indeed, studies have demonstrated a direct and significant relation between reading proficiency and post-secondary academic achievement (e.g., Cox et al., 2003; Vaughn et al., 2019). Conversely, students who struggle to become capable readers are not only at-risk academically but face precarious futures beyond the classroom, extending into their ability to function in society at large (Alexander, 2005; Klass et al., 2020).

Undergraduate English Language Learners At-Risk of Reading Difficulties

In the United States, English language learners (ELLs) represent the fastest-growing population of students within the K–12 school system (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). Concomitantly, institutions of higher education are also reporting a similar demographic shift (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). At the postsecondary level, ELLs are facing

Underpinning this study is a theoretical framework derived from the evolution of research related to reading comprehension.

Corresponding Author
Michelle J. Cook, PhD, Penn State Erie
The Behrend College | School Humanities and Social Sciences
170 Kochel Center | Erie, PA 16563
Email: mbc5376@psu.edu

barriers to both participation and attainment (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). More specifically, postsecondary ELLs who are still in the process of acquiring English and thus require academic supports are at risk of academic difficulty and the possibility of not successfully completing their program when compared to their English-proficient peers (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). Kanno and Varghese surveyed university students who spoke a language other than English as their primary language and found that the foremost reported linguistic challenges faced by these students were related to reading and writing. In terms of the former, the students identified reading comprehension as the chief barrier (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). This finding is further substantiated by Roessingh and Douglas (2012), who noted that the literacy demands of postsecondary education placed ELLs at academic risk.

Although Kanno and Varghese (2010) focused on content-specific vocabulary as a significant contributory factor to challenges relating to reading comprehension, Haager and Osipova (2017) asserted that for some ELLs, intervention in foundational reading skills is required. Haager and Osipova described the "pathways to academic learning" (p. 12) model for addressing the reading challenges experienced by some ELLs. In this model, the researchers delineated two pathways: (a) intervention in foundational reading skills and language mechanics, and (b) embedded instruction in vocabulary and comprehension strategies in addition to oral and written language opportunities (Haager & Osipova, 2017). Haager and Osipova also noted that ELLs will vary in terms of the type of support needed (i.e., interventions based on a single pathway or both). Thus, some students may only require explicit content-related vocabulary instruction and support with comprehension strategies in order to enhance reading comprehension, while others may benefit from targeted short-term intervention in foundational reading skills (Haager & Osipova, 2017).

The provision of interventions that target foundational reading skills (i.e., Pathway 1) is a process that Haager and Osipova (2017) called *backfilling* and defined as "filling in gaps in students' basic reading and oral language skills in the second language" (Haager & Osipova, 2017, p. 12). These researchers asserted that the need for intensive intervention in foundational reading skills is dependent on student-specific factors such as (a) whether ELLs are students with interrupted formal education (e.g., students who are refugees and have experienced disruptions in their formal education [see Hos, 2020]) and (b) whether ELLs have had restricted exposure to English (Haager & Osipova, 2017). Given that postsecondary institutions are recruiting a greater number of students who are considered to be ac-

ademically underprepared (Salehi et al., 2020), including immigrant and refugee ELL students (Kanno & Varghese, 2010), backfilling may be required. This call for intervention in foundational skills was also made by Perin (2013), who posited that in terms of reading comprehension, both decoding and linguistic comprehension strategies needed to be explicitly taught to postsecondary students who are academically underprepared such as those with low English language proficiency. Given that Haager and Osipova (2017) determined that "Many ELLs with some proficiency still experience critical gaps in foundational skills that could be addressed with short-term intervention" (p. 12–13), the reading intervention described in this study was selected to provide undergraduate ELLs who self-identify as at-risk of reading difficulty with the backfilling they may require. Next, we describe how the specific components of the reading intervention that formed the basis of this study were selected based on Scarborough's reading rope (Scarborough, 2001).

Theoretical Framework: Reading Comprehension

Underpinning this study is a theoretical framework derived from the evolution of research related to reading comprehension. Snow (2002) defined reading comprehension as "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (p. 11). Research into the mechanisms that support reading comprehension has led to the development of explanatory conceptual models. Duke and Cartwright (2021) positioned both the Simple View of Reading (SVR: Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990) and Scarborough's reading rope (Scarborough, 2001) as two of the foremost models used to illustrate research related to the science of reading. The SVR posits that reading comprehension is achieved by combining effective decoding and listening comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Indeed, the pivotal roles of both decoding and vocabulary are reflected in the synthesis of the research by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) as the following five areas of knowledge were determined to be fundamental to reading success: (a) phonological awareness, (b) alphabetical principle, (c) fluency, (d) text comprehension strategies, and (e) vocabulary knowledge. Building on this research is Scarborough's reading rope (Scarborough, 2001). Duke and Cartwright (2021) suggested that this latter model is more precise than SVR because it "unpacks the word recognition and language comprehension constructions" (p. 534). In Scarborough's reading rope, Scarborough proposed two strands that weave together to ultimately create the rope representing reading comprehension. The language

comprehension strand consists of (a) background knowledge, (b) vocabulary, (c) language structures, (d) verbal reasoning, and (e) literacy knowledge. The word recognition strand is composed of (a) phonological awareness, (b) decoding, and (c) sight recognition. Scarborough postulated that as language comprehension becomes more strategic and word recognition becomes automatic, skilled reading is achieved.

Due to Scarborough's reading rope's specificity in terms of identifying the underlying components contained within each strand, it was selected as the theoretical underpinning of this study. Herein, we explain how the components of the reading intervention described in this study map onto the strands of Scarborough's reading rope. The intervention in this study prioritizes foundational skills related to the word recognition strand (i.e., phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition). Additionally, reading fluency is also targeted to address the importance of developing automaticity of these skills when reading to support comprehension. Although the word recognition strand is emphasized within this intervention, the vocabulary component of the language comprehension strand is also addressed. However, the vocabulary incorporated in the intervention is more general in nature rather than highly content-specific, as would be the case when *frontloading* in Pathway 2 which involves "explicitly pre-teaching key vocabulary and concepts so that, during whole-class instruction, ELL students will have confidence in understanding words" (Haager & Osipova, 2017, p. 13).

Reading Interventions: Language of Instruction

It is important to address the issue of the language of instruction when delivering reading interventions. Although some schools whose ELL populations are homogeneous (e.g., Spanish speaking) have employed bilingual instructional models, schools where the students identify as speaking a vast array of native languages have primarily provided instruction in English (Calderon et al., 2011). Kamps et al. (2007) reviewed the extant research and asserted that instruction of reading skills delivered in English is associated with positive reading outcomes for ELLs, irrespective of their L1. Given that the participants in this study spoke a number of different languages as their primary language, the intervention was delivered in English.

> Although the word recognition strand is emphasized within this intervention, the vocabulary component of the language comprehension strand is also addressed.

The Current Study

The pilot, quasi-experimental study described herein is designed to examine the effects of a reading intervention for undergraduate ELLs who self-identify as experiencing difficulties in the area of reading comprehension. Given that research has shown that some ELLs may require intervention in foundational reading skills in order to support their reading comprehension, we implemented a phonologically based reading intervention to address reduced reading comprehension for first-year postsecondary ELLs when reading in their L2. The objective was to determine if a phonologically based reading intervention would result in significant between-group differences for the proximal variables of decoding and sight word recognition and the distal variable of reading comprehension for undergraduate ELLs at-risk of reading difficulties.

Method

Design

A quasi-experimental group research design was employed. Participants in the treatment condition received 30-min intervention sessions twice per week for 4 weeks. Pretest occurred before treatment sessions began with all participants, and the posttest occurred following approximately a total of 320 min of intervention per student in the treatment group. All pretests, posttests, and intervention sessions were administered by the lead researcher.

Participants

Participants were selected using non-probability purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). Additionally, homogeneous sampling (Etikan et al., 2016) was employed in order to hone in on students who reported experiencing similar challenges relating to reading comprehension. Participants were chosen following a three-step selection process. First, the University's ELL program director sent a recruitment email with the necessary contact information to all students who were deemed suitable candidates for participation in the study. Additionally, instructors who worked directly with ELLs who were in their first year of university were encouraged to notify suitable study participants of the opportunity. In both cases, the onus was placed on the students to contact the lead researcher via email to communicate their interest in participating in the study. Finally, the lead researcher visited four university-level introductory

composition classes for ELLs and described the project to the students. A participant sign-up sheet was distributed, and interested students provided their contact information. The second step for locating eligible study participants involved the completion of a participant questionnaire (see Appendix A). Two students contacted by the ELL program director expressed interest in participating in the study and completed the participant questionnaire. Of the approximately 60 students enrolled in the classes visited by the lead researcher, 25 initially expressed interest in participating in the study, and five followed through and completed the participant questionnaire. Finally, information obtained using the participant questionnaire was organized into a table to allow for a point-by-point evaluation using inclusion criteria. To be eligible, participants had to (a) speak a language other than English as their L1, (b) reside in the U.S. for 2 years or more and/or have been enrolled in English classes for more than 4 years, and (c) self-report as experiencing difficulty with English reading comprehension. Six of the seven students were identified as meeting the inclusion criteria. The student excluded from the study did not self-report as having difficulty with reading comprehension in English.

The treatment participants for this study were six undergraduate university students. Most of the participants spoke Chinese as their L1 (66.7%). The other participants either spoke Spanish (16.7%) or Arabic as their L1 (16.7%). All the included participants reported experiencing difficulties with reading comprehension in their L2. Time spent in the U.S. ranged from 7 months to 5 years; however, all participants met the inclusionary criteria when exposure to English through school courses was considered. In terms of gender, 66.7% of the participants were male, and 33.3% were female. Their ages during the study ranged between 18 and 22 years old.

Given the small number of participants and time restrictions due to the end of the school year, the control group was comprised of three students who had initially volunteered for participation in the study but did not follow through by completing the participant questionnaire. The three students expressed a willingness to take the pre and posttests without an opportunity to participate in the intervention. Although this represents an unbalanced design with fewer participants in the control group than in the treatment group, Hutchins et al. (2016) demonstrated that studies with a smaller control group can generate valid and accurate findings in terms of effect size. Control participants had similar demographic profiles when compared with the treatment group. However, all control participants spoke Chinese as their L1.

Setting

This study was conducted at a university campus in the northeastern part of the United States. The campus is located on the periphery of a mid-sized urban center in a suburban setting. Assessments and intervention sessions for the treatment group took place in a small office on campus. The pre and posttests for the control group were administered in a study room at the university campus library.

Materials

Measures

Pre and posttest materials consisted of the *Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement* (Schrank et al., 2014). Specifically, the pretest involved *Form B Standard*, and the posttest involved *Form A Standard*. In both cases, the same subtests were utilized where the proximal variables were measured using: (a) *Test 7 Word Attack* and (b) *Test 1 Letter-Word Identification*. The distal variable was measured using *Test 4 Passage Comprehension*. These subtests were selected because they are well-known standardized tests extensively used in educational settings (Lovett et al., 2008). *Test 7 Word Attack* was used as a measure of decoding. Participants were asked to read nonwords presented in printed form aloud. A cut-off rule of six consecutive errors was applied. The participants' scores were the number of correct items. *Test 1 Letter-Word Identification* was used to assess sight word recognition. The test required that participants read isolated words aloud. Words were presented in order of difficulty beginning with easier words. The words were presented in printed form. The participants' scores were the number of words read correctly. A cut-off rule of six consecutive mistakes was applied. Finally, *Test 4 Passage Comprehension* was used as a measure of the distal variable of reading comprehension. Participants were asked to read sentences in printed form to themselves and provide the missing words. A cut-off rule of six consecutive errors was applied. The participants' scores were the number of correct items.

Reading Intervention

Intervention materials consisted of lessons drawn from the *Corrective Reading: Decoding Strand* (Engelmann et al., 2008a). Each lesson involved the use of a leveled teacher presentation book and a corresponding non-consumable student book. Data collection materials included a pencil, a timer, and accompanying data-tracking sheets such as fluency charts. A small whiteboard, dry-erase marker, and eraser were used for word attack activities.

Effect Size Calculations

Due to the small sample size (n ≤ 20), we used

Hedges' *g* to calculate an estimate of effect size as it "corrects for the upward bias that arises in Cohen's *d* when estimated in small samples" (Turner & Bernard, 2006, p. 45). To calculate effect size for each subtest, we replicated the procedures employed by Hwang and Riccomini (2016). Hedges' *g* was calculated for this study to estimate the effect size related to specific measures of reading skill: word attack, letter-word identification, and passage comprehension. Given that this study included a control group, effect size was calculated as $d = ((X_{post.trt} - X_{pre.trt}) - (X_{post.ctr} - X_{pre.ctr})) \Big/ \sqrt{\frac{(n_{trt}-1)s_{trt}^2 + (n_{ctr}-1)s_{ctr}^2}{ntrt + nctr - 2}}$. For the respective treatment and control groups, $X_{post.trt}$ and $X_{post.ctr}$ were unadjusted posttest means, $X_{pre.trt}$ and $X_{pre.ctr}$ were unadjusted pretest means, n_{trt} and n_{ctr} were sample sizes, and S_{trt} and S_{ctr} were unadjusted posttest standard deviations. Following the recommendations of Hedges and Olkin (1985), an unbiased estimator was obtained by multiplying all of the effect sizes by $(1 \frac{3}{4(ntrt + nctr) - 9})$, which represents a "correction factor for small samples" (Turner & Bernard, 2006, p. 45). Standard errors, and confidence intervals were calculated and reported with the corresponding effect sizes.

Procedures

Pretest

Students in both the treatment and the control groups completed the pretest. The lead researcher met individually with each participant with all materials ready, including the *Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement Form B Standard* (Schrank et al., 2014) and the corresponding scoring sheets. The testing book was positioned upright on the table directly between the participant and the lead researcher, with the pages to be read by the participant facing the participant and the pages to be read by the lead researcher facing the lead researcher. The scoring sheets were arranged behind the testing book so that they were not visible to the participant. The lead researcher followed the script provided in the standard test book to guide all verbal prompts/feedback. The participants completed the activities while the lead researcher scored each response according to the guidelines indicated by the *Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement Form B Standard* (Schrank et al., 2014).

Pre-Intervention

As required by the *Corrective Reading: Decoding Strand* (Engelmann et al., 2008a), a decoding placement test was used to determine the appropriate leveled placement for each participant in the treatment condition to start the program. The decoding placement test required that participants read four passages orally. A single two-sided sheet with the four passages was provided to the participants. The lead researcher retained an identical copy of the single two-sided sheet with the four passages and noted errors directly on this form. The form was positioned so that the participant could not see what the lead researcher was writing. The lead researcher followed the verbal prompts as directed in the guidelines for administering the test. The following participant responses were noted as errors: (a) adding a word that did not appear in the story; (b) words that were misidentified; (c) any word that was not identified within 3 seconds; (d) a mistake that was subsequently self-corrected by the student; or (e) a word that was sounded out at a rate that was not equivalent to a normal speaking rate that could not be correctly identified by the participant following the lead researcher's prompt (Engelmann et al., 2008a, p. 246).

Intervention

Intervention sessions took place two times per week for four weeks. Participants began the intervention using the appropriate decoding strand level as indicated by the decoding placement test. For each intervention session, the participant and the lead researcher met under the same conditions as described during the pretest. The lead researcher followed the scripted lessons in the leveled teacher presentation book (Engelmann et al., 2008b). Each lesson, regardless of level, followed a similar structure. The lessons began with exercises targeting word-attack skills using a whiteboard. For example, the lead researcher printed words on the board such as 'laid, aim, and snail' and asked the participant, "What word?" while pointing at each word individually. Then the lead researcher replaced the letters 'ai' with the letters 'ar' and asked the student, "What word now?" (Engelmann et al., 2008b, p. 2). The following procedure to correct word identification errors was employed: (a) The word is _____; (b) What word? (signal) _____; (c) Spell _____; and (d) Go back to the first word in the row/column (Engelmann et al., 2008b, p. 3).

The next exercise involved the introduction of various sound combinations. For example, participants were told that the letters S-H go together and

Each lesson involved the use of a leveled teacher presentation book and a corresponding non-consumable student book.

make the sound "shsh." The participants were then presented with a word containing the sound that was underlined. Participants were asked to say the sound for the underlined part and then read the word. This process was repeated for other sound combinations. Next, participants read additional words containing the various sound combinations by first saying the sound and then reading the word (Engelmann et al., 2008b, p. 3–4).

Exercises involving the presentation of vocabulary and corresponding definitions were then presented. Participants were both presented with the meaning of words as well as asked to use the vocabulary word in a sentence. Following the introduction of vocabulary, participants were provided with a list of words that were to be practiced by reading the words orally. Error correction procedures were the same as those described above.

Finally, participants engaged in a story reading. First, they were asked to read the title and infer the plot presented in the passage. Next, participants read the passage. The lead researcher would stop the participants and ask comprehension questions throughout the reading of the text as indicated in the teacher presentation book. To correct word reading errors, the following procedures were used: (a) The word is _____; (b) Touch under that word; (c) What word?; and (d) Go back to the beginning of the sentence and read that sentence again (Engelmann et al., 2008b, p. 6).

Lastly, a fluency assessment was conducted using the same passage. Participants were provided 2 min and were asked to "read like they talk." Errors were scored by the lead researcher, and the same scoring procedures as those described for the decoding placement test were employed. At the end of the 2-min fluency assessment, the participants used an individual reading progress chart to graph the number of words read during the 2 min and the number of errors.

Posttest

Participants in both the treatment and the control groups completed the posttest. The posttest consisted of three subtests from the *Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement Form A Standard* (Schrank et al., 2014): (a) *Test 1 Letter-Word Identification*, (b) *Test 7 Word Attack*, and (c) *Test 4 Passage Comprehension*. Procedures mirrored those described for the pretest.

Dependent Variable

The distal dependent variable for this study was reading comprehension. Reading comprehension was operationally defined as the ability to extract meaning from English text. Reading comprehension was measured using the *Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement Form B Standard* (Schrank et al., 2014) Test 4 Passage Comprehension. Additionally, the two proximal dependent variables of decoding and sight word recognition were also included, given that efficient word-attack and word identification skills are hypothesized to reduce demands on working memory and subsequently support reading comprehension (Cain et al., 2004). Furthermore, these two proximal variables map directly onto Scarborough's reading rope in terms of contributing to reading comprehension.

Treatment Integrity

A treatment integrity checklist was developed by the lead researcher (see Appendix B). Treatment integrity data was obtained for 20% of intervention sessions. Treatment integrity was measured using a point-by-point format where an independent observer scored treatment integrity on 14 items. Items could be scored as either 'not observed' or receive a score of one (inappropriate), two (somewhat appropriate), and three (appropriate). The total number of possible points per session was 42. To obtain a treatment integrity score, the independent observer divided the total number of points by the total number of items. An independent observer (an undergraduate student) was trained in data collection prior to the commencement of the intervention. Practice data collection sessions were scheduled to allow the observer the opportunity to request clarifications. The average treatment integrity was 98.81% for all observed sessions.

Results

Table 1 contains a comparison of the means, standard deviations, sample sizes, effect sizes, and standard errors for the treatment and control groups.

Table 1
Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

Subtest	Comparison	Treatment			Control			Effect size estimate	
		$\bar{X}$	$\sqrt{s^2}$	n	$\bar{X}$	$\sqrt{s^2}$	n	g_{Hedges}	SE_g
Word identification	Treatment vs. Control	66.5	13.91	6	64	3.742	3	0.372	0.635
Passage comprehension	Treatment vs. Control	38.8	9.739	6	39.3	2.161	3	0.043	0.629
Word attack	Treatment vs. Control	26	6.928	5	25.3	1.634	3	0.288	0.639

Decoding

The Word Attack mean at pretest of 21.8 for the treatment group corresponds roughly to a grade equivalent (GE) of 4–9. The Word Attack mean at posttest of 26 for the treatment group corresponds roughly to a GE of 9–2, indicating a change in GE of 4–3. All treatment participants scored below their current grade equivalent level at pretest, with three participants scoring at or below a GE of 3–6 at pretest indicating initial difficulties in decoding. The Word Attack mean at pretest of 23 for the control group corresponds roughly to a grade equivalent (GE) of 5–7. The Word Attack mean at of 25.3 for the control group corresponds roughly to a GE of 7–6, indicating a change in GE of 1–9. All control participants scored at or below a GE of 6.7 at pretest, indicating initial difficulties in decoding.

Table 2
Word Attack: Descriptive Statistics

Group	Pretest mean	Posttest mean
Treatment	21.8	26.0
Control	23.0	25.3

Sight Word Recognition

The Letter-Word Identification mean at pretest of 66.3 for the treatment group corresponds roughly to a GE of 7–7. The Letter-Word Identification mean at posttest of 66.5 for the treatment group corresponds roughly to a GE of 9–6, indicating a change in GE of 1–9. All treatment participants scored below their current grade equivalent level at pretest indicating initial difficulties in word reading. The Letter-Word Identification mean at pretest of 66.3 for the control group corresponds roughly to a GE of 8–9. The Letter-Word Identification mean at posttest of 64 for the control group corresponds roughly to a GE of 7–6, indicating a change in GE of negative 1–3. All control participants scored below their current grade equivalent level at pretest indicating initial difficulties in word reading.

Table 3
Letter-Word Identification: Descriptive Statistics

Group	Pretest mean	Posttest mean
Treatment	66.3	66.5
Control	66.3	64.0

Reading Comprehension

The Passage Comprehension mean at pretest of 33.8 for the treatment group corresponds roughly to a GE of 4–5. The Passage Comprehension mean at of 38.8 for the treatment group corresponds roughly to a GE of 7–7, indicating a change in GE of 3–2. No participant in the treatment group scored above a GE of 6–3 at pretest, indicating initial difficulties in reading comprehension. The Passage Comprehension mean at pretest of 34.7 for the control group corresponds roughly to a GE of 4–5. The Passage Comprehension mean at posttest of 39.3 for the control group corresponds roughly to a GE of 7–7, indicating a change in GE of 3–2. No participant in the treatment group scored above a GE of 5–7 at pretest, indicating initial difficulties in reading comprehension.

Table 4
Passage Comprehension: Descriptive Statistics

Group	Pretest mean	Posttest mean
Treatment	33.8	38.8
Control	34.7	39.3

Effect size

The result for the Word Attack subtest indicates that the sample estimate of the effect of the reading intervention on study participants is 0.288 SD, but the effect of the reading intervention on study participants in the population (from which the sample was drawn) has a range (95% CI = -0.921, 1.583). The result for the Word Identification subtest indicates that the sample estimate for the effect of the reading intervention on study participants is 0.372 SD, but the effect of the reading intervention on study participants in the population (from which the sample was drawn) has a range (95% CI = -0.826, 1.664). Finally, the result for the Passage Comprehension subtest indicates that the sample estimate for the effect of the reading intervention on study participants is 0.043 SD, but the effect of the reading intervention on study participants in the population (from which the sample was drawn) has a range (95% CI = −1.185, 1.281).

Social Validity

The participants were asked to complete a short Social Validity Questionnaire following the final intervention session (see Appendix C). The participants rated statements between one (strongly disagree) and five (strongly agree). All the participants reported that they enjoyed participating in the reading study (μ= 5) and that the reading activities were interesting (μ = 4.8). In terms of their perceptions of the impact of the reading intervention, participants reported: (a) that they felt that their reading fluency had improved over the course of the program (μ = 4.5), (b) that their reading comprehension had improved (μ = 4.5), and that overall, they felt more confident about their reading skills in English (μ= 4.7). Two students did state that they would like to see more opportunities to practice vocabulary. The results support the social validity of the phonologically based reading intervention within the university context.

Discussion

The objective of the current study was to determine whether a phonologically based reading intervention would result in significant between-group differences for decoding, sight word recognition, and reading comprehension for undergraduate ELLs at-risk of reading difficulties. Although the results did not demonstrate a significant between-group difference for the distal variable of reading comprehension, effects were found for the proximal variables of decoding and sight word recognition.

We will begin with a discussion related to the distal variable of reading comprehension. Although no significant effect was found for the measure of passage comprehension, there are a number of factors that should be considered. First, the small sample size may have factored into the results, as it should be noted that in the case of studies where the participant sample is small, a larger effect size is required in order to produce findings that are statistically significant (Slavin & Smith, 2009).

Second, it could be posited that the lack of improvement seen in reading comprehension performance may be due to the truncated treatment time of four weeks. To observe a statistical change in passage comprehension, more time in treatment may be necessary. For example, Lovett et al. (2008) employed three phonologically based reading intervention programs (including *Corrective Reading: Decoding Strand* [Engelmann et al., 2008]) with ELLs in grades 2 through 8 who had been identified as experiencing reading difficulty. Although these researchers reported significant improvements in reading achievement for the participants, it is important to note that the participants received approximately 105 intervention hours.

Finally, reading comprehension is a complex skill that involves the coordination of many subskills (Scarborough, 2001). Although this intervention addressed the backfilling of foundational skills related to the word recognition strand of Scarborough's reading rope, only the vocabulary component of the language comprehension strand was included. Therefore, it could be speculated that other components of the language comprehension strand needed to be addressed for these participants (i.e., background knowledge, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge). Additionally, it is worth noting that Duke and Cartwright (2021) suggested that Scarborough's reading rope should be recalibrated to include an "active self-regulation category" (p. 534). These researchers proposed that in addition to language comprehension and word recognition, readers need to "regulate themselves, actively coordinate the various processes and text elements necessary for successful reading, deploy strategies to ensure reading processes go smoothly,

maintain motivation, and actively engage with text" (Duke & Cartwright, 2021, p. 530). Thus, perhaps our findings point to a need to include intervention components that target either one or both of the following: (a) a broader inclusion of the language comprehension strand of Scarborough's reading rope and/or (b) instruction in active self-regulation reading behaviors as described by Duke and Cartwright (2021).

A small and small-medium effect were calculated for the proximal measures of word attack and word identification, respectively. Given that we employed a phonologically based reading intervention, the treatment sessions placed a significant emphasis on decoding skills, which translated directly into the findings. The pivotal roles of decoding and sight word recognition in terms of developing reading comprehension are supported by Scarborough's reading rope. Furthermore, Burt et al. (2003) noted that adult ELLs should be taught to decode. Therefore, considering that the participants in the treatment condition demonstrated improvement in their decoding skills, amelioration in reading comprehension performance might have been expected. One explanatory factor that might account for the lack of improvement in reading comprehension despite the observed growth in decoding and sight word reading skills is automaticity. According to Cain et al. (2004), comprehension is affected by word reading that is either slow or inaccurate. Cain et al. (2004) posited that text comprehension is curtailed due to the demands placed on the working memory that limit the functioning of other necessary processes, such as integration and inference. This finding is echoed by Nouwens et al. (2017), who concluded that working memory is a reliable predictor of differences in reading comprehension for adults as well as children. As depicted by Scarborough's reading rope, automaticity of these skills (decoding and sight word recognition) is required in order to enhance reading comprehension. Thus, perhaps with further practice and development of fluency, the observed improvement in decoding and sight word recognition may translate into improved reading comprehension for participants.

One caveat to this hypothesis is that Cain et al. (2004) warned that for L1 struggling readers, as they aged and saw improvements in word reading performance, performance in reading comprehension was not necessarily concomitant. One important variable identified by these authors was vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, Burt et al. (2003) explained that ELLs who are able to decode efficiently may still experience reduced performance in reading comprehension if they experience difficulty identifying the meaning of the vocabulary contained within the text. As such, a greater

emphasis on vocabulary development may be warranted in addition to the phonologically based reading intervention. Thus, the suggestion regarding the need to develop automaticity of decoding and sight word recognition skills does not negate the discussion above related to the important role of the language comprehension strand and the need to consider the addition of components within this strand to enhance reading comprehension for these participants.

We also would like to address the unbalanced design utilized in this study, in which there were more participants in the treatment group (*n* = 6) than in the control group (*n* = 3). We propose that this represents a student-centered approach as we did not want to withhold supports from students who may benefit from the reading intervention. Thus, we opted to include all students who volunteered as participants in the treatment group and assigned to the control group students who had originally volunteered to participate but subsequently did not follow through with the participant questionnaire. As a pilot study, our aim was to provide supports to as many students as possible who self-identified as requiring reading supports.

Limitations

The recruitment of participants for the current study relied on student self-reports of reading difficulty. Such methodology may elicit concerns related to the subjectivity of the assessment of the initial reading skill level of participants. However, Parrila et al. (2007) investigated the accuracy of using student self-reports to identify university students with a history of reading difficulty and determined that employing student self-reports is a viable method for accurately locating individuals with a history of reading problems.

We also recognize that a disadvantage related to the use of a group design for this study is associated with the reduced number of participants. As such, the present study may not have been adequately powered to detect significant between-group differences. We consider this pilot study as a proof of concept that warrants further research and the inclusion of a greater number of participants.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that grade norms should be interpreted with

caution as the growth rate is not consistent across grades in the areas of cognitive, psycho-motor, and affective development (Aiken, 2003). Reynolds (1981) warned that the use of GE can overemphasize concerns about reading assessments in the upper grades. Furthermore, given the inconsistency across grades described by Aiken (2003), changes in performance between the pretest and posttest that involve calculating the difference in GE should be understood in light of the limitations of such calculations.

An uncontrollable threat to the internal validity of the study was that the participants were concurrently participating in a variety of English university courses. As such, we cannot eliminate learning from other classes as a confounding variable.

Conclusion, Future Research, and Application to Practice

This study represents an initial investigation to examine whether a phonologically based reading intervention will result in significant between-group differences for decoding, sight word recognition, and reading comprehension for undergraduate ELLs with self-reported reading difficulty. Although a small and small-medium effect were calculated for the measures of word attack and word identification, respectively, no effect was found for the measure of passage comprehension. Thus, initial findings support the use of a phonologically based reading program to improve students' decoding and sight word skills that are key components of the word recognition strand of the Scarborough's reading rope and thus contribute to the development of reading comprehension. However, more research over an extended period of time is needed to examine whether the development of automaticity in decoding and sight word recognition will translate into improved reading comprehension or whether the inclusion of components from the language recognition strand of Scarborough's reading rope or other active self-regulation reading strategies are required in order to see the needle move in terms of reading comprehension.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

> As such, a greater emphasis on vocabulary development may be warranted in addition to the phonologically based reading intervention.

About the Authors

Michelle J. Cook, PhD, *is an assistant professor of Special Education at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College. Her research is primarily focused on evidence-based learning interventions for English language learners who either have disabilities or may be at risk of academic difficulty in the areas of reading and writing. Prior to her career in higher education, she was an elementary teacher in Alberta, Canada where she taught in a French immersion program. As such, Dr. Cook has extensive experience instructing students with and without special needs in a second language context.*

Elizabeth M. Hughes, PhD, *is an associate professor of Special Education at The Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Hughes' research evaluates literacy and mathematics interventions for students with disabilities and those considered to be at risk for academic challenges. She is especially interested in the role of language in academic content learning. She has published her research in several peer-reviewed journals, including* The Elementary School Journal, Teaching of Psychology, Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, and Teaching Exceptional Children. *She is the chair of the Professional Development, Standards, and Ethics Committee for the Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Learning Disabilities. She is also a parent of a child with a reading disability. Prior to her career in higher education, she was an elementary teacher outside of Atlanta, Georgia.*

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Appendix A

Participant Checklist

Title of Project: Multicomponent Reading Intervention: Effects on the Reading Comprehension of Undergraduate English Learners At-Risk of Reading Difficulties

Your participation in this questionnaire and willingness to provide the requested information is strictly voluntary. Refusal to complete this form will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

Please circle the appropriate response.

1. Are you currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at a university?

    Yes   No

2. Are you currently 18 years of age or older?

    Yes   No

    a. If you circled "yes" for question 2, please indicate your age: _____

3. Was the primary language spoken at home with your parent(s) when you were first learning to speak a language other than English?

    Yes   No

    a. If you circled "yes" for question 3, please indicate what primary language you spoke at home with your parent(s) when you were first learning to speak: _____

4. Have you lived in the United States for at least 2 years?

    Yes   No

    a. If you circled "yes" for question 4, please indicate the number of years you have lived in the United States: _____

5. Do you experience difficulty reading in English?

    Yes   No

    a. If you circled "yes" for question 5, please provide more specific information (E.g., When I read text in English, I have difficulty understanding the meaning of what I have read" or "I read slowly in English and this can cause me difficulty making sense of what I have read").

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Are you able to understand what is being asked in order for you to participate in this study?

    Yes   No

Appendix B

Treatment Fidelity Observation Form: Corrective Reading

Interventionist:_____
Observer: _____
Date: _____ Time: _____ Fidelity Rating: _____

Please circle the number which best describes your observation of the use of each instructional skill. The observation should last the entire reading lesson.

Scale:
NO: Not observed
1. *Inappropriate*
2. *Somewhat Appropriate*
3. *Appropriate*

Learning Environment			
1. Materials were organized and readily available.			
No	1	2	3
2. Teachers could see all students; students could see the teacher.			
No	1	2	3
Management			
3. Lesson began within 2 or 3 minutes of designated time.			
No	1	2	3
4. Student(s) is on-task and/or off-task behavior is addressed.			
No	1	2	3

Presentation

5. Teacher delivered clear instructions.

    No   1   2   3

6. Teacher provided clear signals to elicit student response.

    No   1   2   3

7. 100% student response on signal.

    No   1   2   3

8. Teacher provided firm-up repetitions after student errors. (Mispronunciations due to accent are exempt).

    No   1   2   3

9. Teacher delivers instruction at a brisk pace.

    No   1   2   3

10. Student(s) tracks in workbook when necessary.

    No   1   2   3

Intervention Components

11. Work Attack

    No   1   2   3

12. Vocabulary

    No   1   2   3

13. Reading Comprehension

    No   1   2   3

14. Fluency Assessment

    No   1   2   3

Total number of points: _____
Total number of possible points: 42
Fidelity Score (divide total points by total number of items [14]): _____

Adapted from the "Corrective Reading Fidelity Observation Form" (2007) available at the RTI Action Network (http://www.rtinetwork.org/checklists/633-available-treatment-integrity-protocols).

Appendix C

Participant Feedback Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this reading study. To fully ascertain the value of this reading project, I would like to understand your personal impressions of the reading activities. Your feedback will remain anonymous and will be used to inform how future reading interventions like this one should be conceived and carried out. Your completion of this questionnaire is completely voluntary.

Please read the following statements and circle the appropriate number.

1. **Strongly Disagree**
2. **Disagree**
3. **Neither Agree nor Disagree**
4. **Agree**
5. **Strongly Agree**

a) I enjoyed participating in this reading project.

    1   2   3   4   5

b) Overall, the reading activities were interesting.

    1   2   3   4   5

c) The individual reading sessions lasted an appropriate amount of time.

    1   2   3   4   5

d) I feel that my reading fluency (the ability to read words quickly and accurately) improved over the course of the sessions.

    1   2   3   4   5

e) I feel that my ability to understand what I read in English improved over the course of the sessions.

    1   2   3   4   5

f) Overall, I feel more confident about my reading skills in English.

    1   2   3   4   5

g) Given the opportunity, I would like to continue with more sessions of this reading program.

    1   2   3   4   5

h) I would recommend this reading program to others.

    1   2   3   4   5

Is there any other feedback that you would like to provide regarding the reading program?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

The Peer Tutor and Supplemental Instruction Leader Experience: Perceived Gains in Learning, Connection to Campus, and Fulfillment

Rebecca Cofer, *The Learning Center, Georgia College & State University*

ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceived gains of postsecondary peer educators, specifically related to their views of learning, feelings of connection to campus, and feelings of fulfillment as a result of their roles. The peer educator in the campus learning center is a critical but undervalued resource for student success. This is reflected in the literature, which has a gap in the research related to the experience of the peer educators themselves. To address this problem, a survey was sent through public listservs to college learning assistance professionals, who then distributed it to their respective peer tutors and SI leaders (*N* = 1217). Using three open-ended questions from the Peer Educator Experiences Survey, I analyzed responses to generate several themes for each question. I identified five distinct themes from responses to the first question, which asked participants about their views of learning. Of the five themes, "learned how/ways people learn" had the highest frequency of responses (*n* = 239). I discovered four themes from responses to the second question that asked about the most rewarding aspect of their jobs. For this question, the theme of "helping/witnessing growth" was the most evident response (*n* = 326). The final question asked about participants' connections to campus; again, four themes identified four distinct themes. The theme of "campus people/resources" proved to be the most populous (*n* = 203). Institutions and learning center administrators should consider these results when recruiting, training, assessing, and requesting funds for these programs.

Keywords: tutor, Supplemental Instruction leader, peer assistance

The use of peer educators to assist in retention and persistence is not revolutionary in higher education. From the health peer educators who inform students of healthy decision-making to the mentors assigned to first-year students, peer educators are a critical part of the strategies institutions employ to help students succeed. Campus learning centers are no exception to this practice, as both peer tutors and Supplemental Instruction (SI) leaders are a part of these peer assistance programs. Peers are one of the top influencers on college students (Astin, 1993; Kim, 2015; Kim et al., 2021; Kuh, 1995). Peer tutors work with their tutees (those they tutor) to assist in not only content knowledge but also study skills and time management. SI leaders function in a different manner, as they facilitate collaborative learning sessions outside of class times in typically challenging courses.

Regardless of the role or history of the peer educator in the campus learning center, research has confirmed that their work is a significant part of the persistence and retention rates of the students they serve. However, less studied is the impact of the peer tutor and SI leader experience on these peer educators. Abbot et al. (2018) succinctly described the research stating that few "have asked tutors directly about their experiences" (p. 245). Even less often researched is the experience as a whole regarding the holistic work of the peer educator in the campus learning center. In studying the experience for the learning center peer educator, namely the peer tutor and SI leader, new dimensions can be added to the persistence equation in the data-driven funding model of higher education.

Even though administrators and scholars alike agree that peer educators in campus learning centers are valuable tools for persistence, the number of financial and other resources allotted to these departments is not equitable to the work they do. In short, the resource allocation for these centers is not equal to their value in student retention. This body of research needs a more inclusive approach—one that considers the experiences of both the peer

Corresponding Author
Rebecca D. Cofer, EdD, Georgia College & State University
231 W. Hancock Street | Milledgeville, GA 31061
Email: rebecca.cofer@gcsu.edu

tutor and the SI leader as many of these student transitions between roles in their tenure at their learning centers.

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of the peer educator in the campus learning center, specifically as it related to academic learning gains, rewarding aspects of the experience, and connection to campus. As a learning assistance professional, I explored the gains of the peer tutor and SI leader experiences in several capacities, both anecdotally and in published articles. Prior to analysis of the current study's results, the quantitative results from the sample were published in a peer-reviewed journal. The findings from this quantitative portion of the study showed that peer educators perceived the most gains in the non-academic skillset subcategory. Additionally, there was a statistically significant difference in the gains for the peer tutors, but the length of time serving in the roles did not present significant differences. In addition to better informing the practices and approaches for student success, this research may also contribute to the training and assessment of these peer educators.

Literature Review

My review of the literature on the peer tutor and SI leader experience found three areas of gains: academic performance and learning for the peer educators, feelings of self-confidence and fulfillment, and non-academic skillsets attributed to the work. In reviewing research on the experience for the campus learning center peer educator, the literature is limited and separated into studies about the peer tutor experience and those about the SI leader experience. Although not devoted solely to the work of the peer tutor and SI leader, Newton and Ender (2010) explored the use of the campus peer educator and argued for their efficiency, stating, "they are experienced with the campus, they are economical to the budget, they can relate to the situations of fellow students, and they are effective" (p. 3). Skipper and Keup (2017) elaborated on this argument as they used data from both the 2009 and the re-administered 2013 Survey on Peer Leaders, noting that the campus peer educator's role developed beyond that of an educator to a peer leader, thus supporting the survey's title. The scholars also found that the research related to these peer leaders' experiences was "relatively underdeveloped" (Skipper & Keup, 2017, p. 96).

> Regardless of the role or history of the peer educator in the campus learning center, research has confirmed that their work is a significant part of the persistence and retention rates of the students they serve.

Academic Performance and Learning for the Peer Educator

When reviewing the gains related to academic performance and learning, the literature described this subcategory in several ways, including metacognitive skills and content knowledge gained, awareness of learning styles, and scores on content assessment knowledge (Arco-Tirado et al., 2011; Blanc & Martin, 1994; DeBacker et al., 2012; Lockie & Van Lanen, 2008; Malm et al., 2012). Studies tended to focus on tutors in the STEM and health science fields (Brannagan et al., 2013; Dioso-Henson, 2012; Iwata et al., 2014; Unger et al., 2014). Dioso-Henson (2012) and Brannagan et al. (2013) both studied STEM tutors' increases in content knowledge in physics and nursing, respectively. Pulling and Allen (2014) developed this argument further by examining how their work helped tutors explain their content knowledge effectively. Studies on this subcategory of gains for the SI leader examined the experience through multiple perspectives, such as that of the former SI leader or through the lens of the academic mindset of the SI leaders (Congos & Stout, 2003; Hoiland et al., 2020). Again, several studies utilized STEM SI leaders as participants, but Smuts (2002) diverged from this STEM trend and found increases in understanding and interest in teaching/learning for Law School SI leaders. Similarly, in a collection of essays by current and former writing center tutors, Orsini and Kleinman (2022) found gains in understanding how diverse learning can be. In an essay, one former tutor explained, "Seeing a diversity of students led me to gain a better understanding as to how students learn based on a wide spectrum" (p. 10).

Feelings of Self-confidence and Fulfillment

The next subcategory of gains found in the literature was self-confidence and fulfillment for the peer tutors and SI leaders. Several studies described self-confidence and fulfillment as increases in personal development and feelings of accomplishment (Stout & McDaniel, 2006). DeFeo and Caparas (2014), Dvorak (2001), and Sneddon (2015) had feelings of fulfillment reported by participants as they transformed into their roles as tutors. Boyd and Paterson (2016) also found this subcategory of gains, but their participants were previous tutors reflecting on their work afterward. Al Kharusi's (2016) tutor participants noted the friendships made through their work and expressed feelings of fulfillment. Several SI leader

studies discussed these same feelings of fulfillment and self-confidence. Lockie and Van Lanen's (2008) qualitative study and then a questionnaire utilized by Malm et al. (2012) reported increased self-confidence after completing their role as SI leaders. Using two unique sample groups of former SI leaders, researchers explored their experiences and found development in the role and unanticipated fulfillment (Eller, 2016; Lozada, 2017). In another study, one participant discussed this concept of fulfillment, stating that her work allowed her to have a legacy at her institution (Hoiland et al., 2020).

Non-Academic Skillsets

The final subcategory of gains found in the literature was non-academic skillsets, described by scholars as skills in areas such as communication, personal, leadership, and interpersonal relationships. An early study about the peer tutor experience found gains related to social skill development when participants expressed increases in managing conflict and nonverbal communication (Mann, 1994). Whether using qualitative or mixed methods tools, scholars like DeFao and Caparas (2014) and Unger et al. (2014) did not provide statistical data to support the gains but relied on tutor reflections to show limited gains in communication skills and perspective development. For the SI leader research, studies on the non-academic subcategory of gains are less substantial in number and qualitative in design. Several studies framed these gains through the reflection of former SI leaders (Goomas, 2014; Lozada & Johnson, 2018). Moorehead (2021) examined the SI leader experience related to organization and communication skill increases at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). One of the most recent publications related to these gains was Orsini and Kleinman's (2022) book, which contained personal narratives from writing center tutors around the world.

Methods

The current study employed a qualitative research design with the use of a survey that contained open-ended items. Using a constructivist paradigm, I explored the experience of the peer educator in the campus learning center, recognizing that each participant's perspective contributed to their perceived gains. The constructivist paradigm assumes there are multiple realities to be studied, and the researcher derives understanding by working through the participants' perspectives (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). For this study, I assumed the peer tutor and SI leader experiences to be unique realities for each peer educator.

Researcher Description

In approaching this study, several considerations had to be accounted for prior to conducting the research. I have served as both a peer tutor and a learning center administrator at several higher education institutions; I also examined the tutor and SI Leader experience previously, including in previous publications and studies of the experience. As the researcher of this study and a professional in the field for close to two decades, I recognized that potential biases existed and worked to manage those biases. I managed these biases through the use of an anonymous survey and communication sent directly to other administrators of centers.

Data Collection/Instrument

Before data collection began, I applied for and received IRB approval from Georgia Southern University. This IRB approval included information regarding how I protected the details of the respondents through an anonymous survey link in Qualtrics. I created a survey (see Appendix) and distributed it to supervisors of peer tutors and SI leaders through two open listservs and direct contacts with learning center administrators. The open listservs I utilized were SI-Net and The Open Forum for Learning Assistance Professionals, both of which professionals across Supplemental Instruction, learning assistance, and higher education can join. The final research instrument, titled The Peer Educator Experiences Survey, had two parts; Part I contained 12 close-ended questions and five open-ended questions, and Part II contained the demographic questions.

Inclusion of open-ended questions in the instrument allowed participants to use their own words, and I initially included only the close-ended and demographic questions. However, after a review of the literature and subsequent consultation with fellow professionals in learning assistance, I added five opened-ended questions. My decision to limit the survey to only 12 close-ended and five open-ended questions is supported by Nardi (2018), who cautioned the desire to gather useful data must be balanced with the goal of an instrument not taking so long to complete that it is not appealing to potential respondents. I used three of the five open-ended questions from the instrument for this study: questions 1, 2, and 4. The three open-ended questions analyzed for this study examined participants' views of learning (question 1), any perceived rewarding aspects of their roles (question 2), and their connection to campus (question 4). The remaining two questions not used in this study asked how the experience connected to their professional and personal goals and how it enriched them as a student. These two remaining questions did not relate to the three subcategories found in the literature review and, as such, did not connect to the research questions.

Sample and Setting

Collection of the participants' demographics and responses was anonymous, and as such, I did not analyze specifics related to background and experience. However, every participant was currently or had been a peer educator within the previous year. Of the 1,217 participants who completed the required portions of the survey, 546 responded to the optional open-ended questions. I could not determine which participants completed the open-ended questions, and as such, the demographic information of the full sample is presented (N = 1217). The largest percentage of participants identified as current or former peer tutors (47.6%, n = 579), with the smallest percentage only having served as SI leaders (25.5%, n = 310). The largest percentage indicated science as the primary subject in their role (28.3%, n = 344), and the largest percentage were serving in their role for one semester (23.6%, n = 287). Related to their personal demographics, the largest percentage of participants identified as White (68.8%, n = 837), female (55.9%, n = 680), and seniors (32.0%, n = 390).

Each respondent completed the demographics portion of the instrument, but the setting for each respondent was not a variable in the study and, as such, was not explored. Participants came from higher education institutions across the United States, Canada, and several centers located internationally. These locations included rural, urban, public schools, and private institutions alike. Learning centers may also have had in-person as well as online tutoring and SI options, especially considering the time period of the study following the pandemic. As this was also not a variable in the study, I did not gather or analyze data on the location of the peer tutors or SI leaders.

Analysis

Prior to reviewing the qualitative data, I analyzed the demographics using descriptive statistics to better understand the sample in this study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that an initial reading of the data allows for a general sense of the information in the responses, and then additional reviews provide familiarity with the data. I used an inductive approach to analyze individual responses for broader. I coded the data by bracketing chunks of related responses into categories and noted a phrase that represented those categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I then grouped codes into themes that represented a common idea in the data. Once the final themes were generated, I determined the frequency of each theme through color coding and recorded these theme frequencies. In cases when a response included multiple themes, I bolded and annotated the response with additional themes and the color code of the initial theme found.

Methodological Integrity

To provide as much integrity to the data collection and analysis processes as possible, I remained distant from the potential respondents, never communicating directly with them and relying solely on their center administrator to relay the survey to these peer educators. I also focused on several features of methodological integrity for qualitative research, such as the adequacy of the data. In reaching out to centers and higher education institutions of all types, I achieved diversity related to the peer educator experience. Maintaining distance from the peer educators allowed me to manage my own perspectives in the data collection. Utilizing quotations from participants in presenting my data also showed groundedness in the study.

Findings

An analysis of the three open-ended questions revealed how peer educators perceived their gains in terms of views of learning, rewarding elements of the experience, and connections to campus. The findings showed peer educators reflected heavily on their experience as rewarding in several ways. The theme I identified most often was feeling accomplished when they helped their students grow and learn. However, the narrative data analyzed indicated largely positive experiences as the peer educators reflected on the ways they had grown in their roles. The three open-ended questions I explored through this study were:

1. How has your view of learning, both your own and others, changed as a result of your work as a peer tutor or SI leader?
2. What have you found to be most rewarding about being a peer tutor or SI leader?
3. How has your work as a peer tutor or SI leader affected your connection to campus?

Common responses from several reviews of the narrative data were compiled and organized by question and then prevalent themes within those responses.

> The findings showed peer educators reflected heavily on their experience as rewarding in several ways.

Question: How Has Your View of Learning Changed?

Regarding the first question about views of learning, I found five in the analysis. The theme I discovered most frequently in the responses to this question was related to respondents learning how others learn, which included strategies and application (*n* = 239). Table 1 reflects the findings for this first question, including the frequency of the themes and sample statements. Several responses noted a realization that learning is a process, something that is constant and unique for each person. The second most common theme related to learning styles is the sense that respondents expressed increased knowledge and appreciation for the varied ways people learn. Respondents expressed more of an idea of the differences in how people learn, as opposed to strong support of the learning style construct, and even referred to them as "preferences" at times. The phrase "learning styles" was used in the generation of this theme, but it was one of several terms used for the different ways of learning respondents expressed.

Table 1
Question 1 Themes

Theme	*n*	Sample respondent statements
Learned how/ ways people learn	239	"Helped me realize people understand better when you explain in ways they see in everyday life."
Learning styles/ preferences	184	"Different people learn differently and accommodating that takes skills that I am learning as a peer tutor."
Skills, qualities changed	68	"Made me think more critically and thoroughly."
Reinforced/ appreciated ideas	30	"I have a greater appreciation for learning and education alongside others."
No/little change; unsure	19	"No, I've always maintained my same beliefs."

Note. *N* = 1217; responses can be counted in multiple themes.

Through their work as peer educators, respondents indicated gains in metacognition related to their students' learning and even their own, which applied to their own classes. Another respondent wrote, "I have started looking for new teaching ways that help with my studying." Based on the themes and data from this question, peer educators in the campus learning center both understood and appreciated learning more as a result of their experience.

Question: What Have You Found to be Most Rewarding?

The next question asked participants about the most rewarding part of their peer educator role; I identified four themes for this question's responses.

Those themes and the corresponding frequency are found in Table 2. Peer educators found the helping aspect of their job as the most rewarding, and several discussed the "ah-ha moments" (*n* = 326). Although the witnessing of these ah-ha moments was phrased differently, it was a common response to this question. One peer educator wrote about these moments, expressing the satisfaction "when something you're explaining finally clicks for your student," whereas another participant expressed this feeling stating they found it rewarding "being present at the moment a concept makes sense for a student."

Table 2
Question 2 Themes

Theme	*n*	Sample respondent statements
Helping/ witnessing growth	326	"The a ha moment students have when they understand something."
Feedback	92	"When the students come up to you after an exam and tell you how well they did."
Relationships	61	"The connections I make with the students"
Personal gains	33	"I was rewarded with such skills as patience and reliability."

Note. *N* = 1217; responses can be counted in multiple themes.

The next most common theme in responses was about the different types of feedback peer educators received (*n* = 92). The feedback included praise directly from their session attendees or tutees. Several respondents explained that they appreciated it when a student returned with updates on their academic performance. One response to this question stated, "I feel so accomplished when a student comes to me after an exam saying that they got an A and contribute that to my sessions." Several participants also included relationship building in their work, as they noted seeing students they worked with on campus was rewarding. The least common response was in regard to personal gains, such as skills improved and experience gained (*n* = 33).

Question: How has Your Work Affected Your Connection to Campus?

The final open-ended question addressed the peer educators' potential connection to campus. Results of the data analysis of this question are presented in Table 3. The theme occurring most often in these responses was about the campus people and resources the peer educator learned about through their work, which led to feelings of connection to their campus (*n* = 203). The individuals they felt more connected with included fellow students, both coworkers and non-coworkers, faculty, and staff. For

example, one participant said this role helped them connect with more people on campus, professors included. Another response explained that these connections would not have been made if it was not for their peer-educating work. One participant explained the connection stating, "I have been able to get more involved in the chem department." Additionally, they said they knew about more resources on campus because of their work. Although more involvement/ presence was the theme noted least, it still accounted for several responses ($n = 40$). A number of participants noted their work made them be present on campus more, which they expressed was beneficial. For example, one peer educator said, "I am more present here physically."

Table 3
Question 3 Themes

Theme	*n*	Sample respondent statements
Campus people/ resources	203	"I get to know more people from a larger variety of academic and personal backgrounds."
Belonging/ connection	113	"I've felt an increased sense of belonging to the community."
Unsure/little/none	82	"Little to none, I've never had a lot of school pride and working for the school didn't change that."
Personal- pride, sense of purpose	77	"I take great pride in my role as a peer tutor."
Involvement/ presence on campus	40	"It has increased my desire to be on campus as well as represent my campus positively."

Note. $N = 1217$; individual student responses can be counted in multiple themes.

Of the three open-ended responses used in this study, the third question elicited the most responses of "unsure/little/none" ($n = 82$). Respondents worded this theme in several ways, explaining that they felt neither more nor less connected because of the hands-off nature of the tutoring job or that they did not feel a significant change in this connection.

Discussion

As found in this study, peer educators perceived gains in terms of how they understood learning to be unique; they also noted aspects they considered to be rewarding about the experience, such as helping others and gaining connections on campus. Two of the themes found least were expressed little or no change in specific attitudes or beliefs and unsure of their gains. Results from this study support previous literature that found the experience of serving as either a peer tutor or an SI leader led to gains in the areas of learning and feelings of fulfillment and connection (Cofer, 2020; DeBacker et al., 2012; DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Dioso-Henson, 2012; Hoiland et al., 2020; Lockie & Van Lanen, 2008; Lozada, 2017; Lozada & Johnson, 2018, 2019; Malm et al., 2012; Moorehead, 2021; Stout & McDaniel, 2006; Unger et al., 2014; Wankiiri-Hale et al., 2021).

Enhanced Views of Learning

Findings related to the question about views of learning were similar to those from Fiorella and Mayer (2013) and Unger et al. (2014), as both studies found that the experience of serving as a peer tutor allowed those tutors to enhance their learning. In question 1 in the current study, the theme found least ($n = 19$) was that of little or no change or unsure of their view of learning. Most participants expressed gains in how they viewed learning for themselves and their students, as they thought more about the learning process than prior to their work as peer educators. This connects directly to the results of DeBacker et al. (2015), who found that tutors employed in a Reciprocal Peer Tutoring program engaged in metacognitive regulation.

Additionally, SI leaders in previous studies noted the benefits of sitting in on the class as part of their role, stating, "Sitting in helps me refresh my memory" or "You're seeing it from different angles" (Lozada, 2017, p. 70). The current study's theme of "reinforced/ appreciated ideas" was similar to these previous studies' findings. When asked about their view of learning, the current study's respondents expressed similar content gains stating, "Being both an SI and tutor has helped me learn the materials more deeply."

Gains in Fulfillment and Self-Confidence

The current study also confirmed peer educators' gains in fulfillment and self-confidence, another trend in the literature. Respondents in the study said of these feelings, "what's most rewarding is helping others learn" and "getting confidence." The narrative data obtained from the current study's instrument supported the argument that serving as a peer tutor or SI leader allowed these student employees to not only feel fulfilled in their work but also increased their confidence and connect to campus. A later study by Malm et al. (2022) also included leaders of PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) in their analysis of the skills gained through the experience.

Participants in the study, who were both PASS and SI leaders from three different institutions, noted several personal skill gains that fall under the rewarding themes in the current study. When asked to reflect on the most significant skills gained, "leadership confidence" was reported by 17% of the respondents from the University of Missouri at Kansas City, 1% of the participants from Northwest university in South Africa, and 34% of those from Lund University in Sweden (Malm et al., 2022). In the current study, one peer

educator expressed the same leadership development noting, "It has allowed me to gain leadership experience." Another 2022 study by Arendale also explored the development of these student leaders using a qualitative methodology of a Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Program in Minnesota. Participants in that study noted, among other reflections, that serving as the sole leader of the group elicited leader identity emergence. The PAL leaders explained that this developed their self-concept as a leader, like several responses noted in the current study.

Peer tutors and SI leaders were aware of the non-academic gains from their experience as well, something previous studies found in excess (Goomas, 2014; Lozada & Johnson, 2018, Malm et al., 2022). Based on the previous research and the current study, peer educators serving in the campus learning center were aware of the gains in terms of skills from the experience, but not to the same degree as was present in other literature. Question 2 had 33 responses related to the theme of these personal gains, which included skills. Although several responses noted these personal gains to include breaking down difficult content, communication skills, and patience, this theme was the least noted in the responses to this question in the current study.

Gains in Connection to Campus

The second open-ended question in the current study related to connection to campus, a finding in several prior studies (Al Kharusi, 2016; Lozada & Johnson, 2019; Wawrzynski et al., 2011). Orsini and Kleinman's (2022) edited work discussed gains from the perspective of the writing tutor, as told through narratives. Nasser's narrative, for example, stated openly, "My role as a tutor has provided me with an environment that made me more confident" (p. 10). Another narrative written by a tutor from Lebanon also commented on the confidence gains they experienced as a result of their work from its onset (Orsini & Kleinman, 2022). A review of the current study's responses about campus connection had similar findings, though several respondents also recognized that their work did not impact their connection to campus. However, the idea that serving in these roles increased peer educators' physical presence and involvement on campus existed throughout the data. One respondent said, "I have to go to the main campus more often which give [sic] me access to services offered by the school." Another noted, "It has made me more present on campus." Although connection to campus as part of the self-confidence

and fulfillment subcategory is not very prevalent in the literature, the current study does support this gain as the theme of belonging/connection had the second-highest frequency of responses.

Strengths and Limitations

While one of this study's strengths lies in the fact that the data came directly from the peer educators, there are also limitations with this approach. I specifically limited my potential participants by only recruiting peer educators that were currently serving in the role or had been in the past year. This decision was based on a need for more recent reflection from the participants but also left out peer educators, whose opinions could have been useful in the study. Additionally, the peer educators may have served as both a peer tutor and an SI leader, which could have presented challenges as they reflected on their experience. The strength of this study, though, lies in the unique perspective of each participant and the diverse nature of the potential participant pool I drew from in data collection. Peer educators from writing centers, math centers, general learning centers, and SI programs all had the opportunity to participate and provide their perspectives.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, multiple conclusions can be drawn about the peer tutor and SI leader experience in the campus learning center. The themes found most frequently in the three open-ended questions related to how they understood learning to be complex and varied (views of learning), the reward of seeing a student understand the material (fulfillment), and connections to campus increasing. Of all three open-ended questions used in this study, connection to campus had the most occurrences of unsure or little change. Peer educators did note several personal gains, but they expressed that their fulfillment came largely from watching others grow.

The findings from this study can be applied not only to future research but also in practice for learning assistance professionals. When considering how learning center professionals can and should recruit and train their peer educators, the results from this study can inform those decisions. Reframing the work of the peer tutor and SI leader to consider the impact these roles have on the peer educators themselves is a needed perspective shift in the research. Considering how the peer-educating experience has been impacted following the COVID pandemic may also be a future research topic; the role of the peer tutor and SI leader may be

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different following the pandemic but still holds significance. Additionally, more research is needed on the SI leader and peer tutor experiences at specific institution types, such as HBCUs and tribal colleges.

Disclosure Statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

About the Author
Rebecca Daly Cofer, EdD, *is currently the assistant director of The Learning Center at Georgia College & State University (GCSU). Dr. Cofer's research explores the peer educator on college campuses, focusing on how the work can positively impact the students serving in these roles. She has published her research in* The Learning Assistance Review *and* The Journal of Peer Learning. *Prior to her time at GCSU, she worked in learning assistance at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College and before that, in Disability Services at Texas Tech University. Cofer holds several leadership roles in professional organizations, such as co-chair of the Peer Assistance Programs Special Interest Group in the College Reading and Learning Association. After attending Virginia Tech for her bachelor's and master's degrees, she earned her doctorate in 2022 from Georgia Southern University in Educational Leadership, with a focus on higher education. As a first-generation college student herself, Cofer's passion lies in helping students be successful; however, they define success.*

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Appendix

Peer Educator Experiences Survey

Part I: Survey Items

Please respond to the below statements by circling the number that reflects the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. For current peer educators, think about your experiences so far. For former peer educators, think back on your experience while in the tutoring role. Below is the 5-point Likert scale that should be used when rating the statements.

1= Strongly Disagree
2= Disagree
3= Neither Agree nor Disagree
4= Agree
5= Strongly Agree

1. Serving as a peer educator increases/increased my self-confidence.

    1   2   3   4   5

2. Serving as a peer educator improves/improved my academic performance.

    1   2   3   4   5

3. Serving as a peer educator improves/improved my communication and listening skills.

    1   2   3   4   5

4. Serving as a peer educator improves/improved my own time management skills.

    1   2   3   4   5

5. Peer educating gives/gave me feelings of fulfillment and accomplishment.

    1   2   3   4   5

6. I develop/developed a better sense of responsibility through my peer educator position.

    1   2   3   4   5

7. Being a peer educator allows/allowed me to develop more patience.

    1   2   3   4   5

8. Being a peer educator helps/helped me be more aware of the learning process for myself.

    1   2   3   4   5

9. Being a peer educator helps/helped me be more aware of the learning process for my tutees/ SI attendees.

    1   2   3   4   5

10. My experience as a peer educator helps/ helped me develop social skills, such as working with diverse groups and empathy skills.

    1   2   3   4   5

11. Being a peer educator makes/made me feel more connected to my institution.

    1   2   3   4   5

12. I believe that the skills I gain/gained being a peer educator will benefit my future professional life.

    1   2   3   4   5

13. Would you like to enter a raffle for the chance to win 1 of 8 $100 gift cards for participating in this survey?

    YES   NO

Added questions to consider:
- How has your view of learning, both your own and others, changed as a result of your work as a peer tutor or SI Leader?
- What have you found to be most rewarding about being a peer tutor or SI Leader?
- Did your experience as a peer tutor or SI Leader enrich you as a student? If so, how?
- How has your work as a peer tutor or SI Leader affected your connection to campus?
- How does the peer tutor or SI Leader experience fit into your professional and/ or personal goals outside of college?
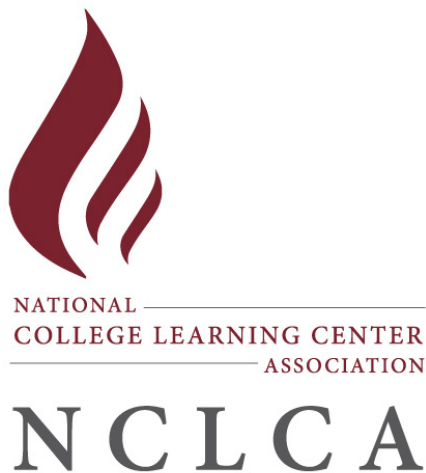
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The Value of Volunteer Leadership for University Students Formerly Enrolled in Prescribed Reading: An Anti-Deficit Model

Timothy S. Nelson, *Department of University Studies, Middle Tennessee State University*

ABSTRACT

Local volunteer opportunities hold the potential for university students to develop as leaders and engaged members of the academic community, but students taking prescribed (sometimes termed *developmental education*) courses may be overlooked as candidates for these kinds of opportunities. Taking an anti-deficit stance, university faculty may promote student success by recruiting students from prescribed courses to participate in carefully-designed volunteer programs. In this qualitative case study, I explored the perceptions of growth in the areas of academic engagement and leadership and the motivation to participate in future community volunteer service in student volunteers who had previously been enrolled in prescribed reading courses. Three such university student volunteers reflected on their experience as leaders in a short-term academic outreach program for high school students. In open-ended survey and interview responses, the university volunteers described their development of specific skills as well as changes in self-perception. Their responses indicated that they perceived the volunteer experience as effectual in all the investigated areas. Notably, they reported that serving as role models for youth encouraged specific academic habits. The study includes descriptions of the academic outreach program with supporting theory for its design because the context of the volunteer service cannot be separated from the findings. This study is a unique contribution to student success literature—there is no previous model linking students from prescribed courses with community volunteer opportunities.

Keywords: university student leadership development, student success, developmental education, anti-deficit, volunteer experiences

Universities provide prescribed courses with the aim of supporting student academic success (Chen, 2016). Yet, it is possible that students in these classes do not typically benefit from other types of opportunities known to foster desirable success outcomes. In this article, I focused on one such opportunity: a carefully planned volunteer program. I helped to develop a community academic outreach and recruited, as volunteers, students who had previously taken prescribed reading courses that I taught. I wondered how and to what degree the participating university students perceived their own growth and development. I addressed this question by conducting a case study.

Development of a Student Volunteer Opportunity

Benjamin (pseudonyms are used for all university students) came to my office to inquire about potential opportunities to volunteer in the surrounding community. I had informally served as a mentor to Benjamin since his enrollment in a prescribed reading support class that I taught during the previous semester at a large university in the southern United States.

At the time of Benjamin's visit, I had been investigating the potential of developing a community literacy program. My research had led me to observe a Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom School site in another city—a model that I found very compelling. In addition to responding to Benjamin with information about various local opportunities, I invited him to join in the beginning stages of the investigation into community partnership possibilities for literacy development. Somewhat serendipitously, I was invited shortly thereafter to join with other university faculty and a local community leader to formulate a grant application for an academic outreach program. The planning team agreed to include Benjamin as a member in all aspects of discussion and decision-making. The

Corresponding Author

Dr. Timothy S. Nelson, Middle Tennessee State University
Box 16 | 1301 E. Main St., Murfreesboro, TN, 37132
Email: timothy.nelson@mtsu.edu

university's Community Service Grant Committee funded the project, and the planning team began to design Scholars Overcoming through Academic Relevance 2020 (SOAR). The program's purpose was to engage local high school students in reading and math enrichment activities that would take different approaches than high school curriculum while supporting engagement and academic success in high school.

Immediately after funding was received, the planning team (now calling ourselves the SOAR Planning Team) began searching for university volunteers. The most likely recruits were students who, like Benjamin, had previous connections with sponsoring faculty. In addition to Benjamin, I recruited three volunteers who were former students from prescribed reading classes. Based on program needs and university student interests, two volunteers exclusively worked with reading activities, one served in both academic areas, and one focused solely on math. The SOAR Planning Team successfully recruited eleven additional volunteers from the community and university.

SOAR was held at a local community center one evening per week from 4:00 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. Approximately nine high school students participated each week. The high school participants were divided into two groups—some participated in 45-min math sessions first, while others began by meeting with their literature circle. A second session was held in which the groups alternated activities. Between each session, students and volunteers enjoyed a meal (included in the grant funding) while listening to a guest speaker. Speakers included a known author of young adult fiction, a small business entrepreneur, a woman working in corporate management, and a local musician. The majority of university student volunteers whom I did not personally recruit served in the areas of set-up, tear-down, and meal service. SOAR met for four of six planned in-person sessions before restrictions related to COVID-19 became necessary. The final two meetings were conducted remotely at a later point in time.

Important Considerations for Engagement with the Community

Facilitating volunteer opportunities for engagement necessarily involves careful planning related to community-university relationships (Gazely et al., 2013). Without this emphasis, community engagement, even when invoking the language of social justice, might exemplify and reproduce problematic themes of power that university faculty and student volunteers may hold in relation to those who are supposed to benefit from the volunteer service. As noted by Simpson (2014), the term *service* has, in many respects, replaced the idea of charity work without transforming the practice. Forms of engagement that reproduce unhealthy power dynamics are harmful to communities and recipients of volunteer service (d'Arlach, 2009) and are also inherently miseducative to university volunteers.

The SOAR Planning Team addressed these issues in a couple of ways. The team selected a particular community center as our event location based on the fact that it was a familiar setting for many local youths. As the team wanted to create an atmosphere of shared leadership instead of a university-based program, we recruited a volunteer staff that included representatives from the local community as well as the university.

Research on specific community volunteer settings attests to the idea that the demographics of university student volunteers affect the level at which the classic *town-and-gown divide* must be considered in planning. Maurrasse (2001) explained that many students at Xavier University (a historically Black university in New Orleans) who were involved in volunteer service came from neighborhoods with similar characteristics to those that they engaged with through university-community initiatives. In contrast, students at Duke University who participated in an after-school tutoring partnership were reported to have had little prior involvement in communities like the one in which they volunteered (Jentleson, 2011). The cultural differences described in the Duke University study were not insurmountable—Jentleson shared positive results. Yet, a setting like this would require additional planning and perhaps volunteer training focused on cultural dynamics.

The SOAR Planning Team was attentive to African American representation among speakers and university and community volunteer leaders in an effort to ensure that the offering was culturally responsive to the anticipated high school participants. Three of the four recruited guests speakers were African American, as were the majority of volunteers. University students and other volunteers who participated in the SOAR program, like those discussed by Maurrasse, generally represented the

demographics of the community. A couple of university student volunteers, in fact, shared that they saw their own experiences mirrored in the lives of the high school participants. Under these conditions, the SOAR Planning Team did not think it necessary to focus additional effort on navigating cultural dynamics. It is important to note that SOAR 2020 was a short-term program, and more consideration for community interaction would have been required for a long-term endeavor.

University Student Volunteer-Led Literature Circles

Literature circle discussion on a shared text is a common component of the prescribed reading courses I teach. Based on this model, the SOAR Planning Team opted to invite university volunteers to host literature circles for high school students. The chosen text was Bryan Stevenson's (2019) *Just Mercy: A True Story of the Fight for Justice (Adapted for Young Adults).* In this book, Stevenson described his legal work with people on death row and provided background for understanding racial inequity and other forms of injustice in the U.S. legal system. The SOAR Planning Team felt that this book would open doors to transformative dialog and noted that some university volunteers were already familiar with Stevenson's work.

I designed an accompanying participant binder and a guide to be used by those leading the literature circles. Literature circle activities included opportunities for written and spoken personal reflection, vocabulary work, role-play, discussions on themes of injustice, and metacognition related to the reading process. The leader's guide provided volunteers with background information about the text, lesson structures, desired outcomes for the literature circle experience, and examples of facilitator talk to foster these outcomes.

University student volunteers who led literature circles encouraged high school participants to complete writing activities in their binders each week. I collected the binders after each session and encouraged the university volunteers to read entries made by the high school students and write positive feedback in response. Each university volunteer who was leading a literature circle added comments at least once during the program's duration, and each high school participant received feedback on some of their reflective writing.

Literature Review

As this article focuses on university volunteer student experiences in a specific program, I have conducted interdisciplinary research to address the facets of this initiative including benefits of university student volunteering, practices associated with volunteering that foster leadership development, anti-deficit instructional approaches, and historical frameworks upon which the academic outreach program investigated in this study was built. In the review that follows, I additionally offer contextual information on university-prescribed reading courses.

University Student Community Volunteering as Academic Engagement

University student community volunteer opportunities can offer environments in which students build confidence and develop practices that promote academic success. Kuh et al. (2010) used *engagement* as a term for "educationally purposeful activities" in the college and university context (p. 13). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2020), a tool used to measure student engagement on college and university campuses, contains a list of 10 general indicators and 47 linked survey items that provide examples of engagement activities, such as reviewing notes and meeting with academic advisors. Many of these items focus on student behaviors, but some pertain to faculty and university staff practices. University student volunteering, under the right conditions, can include identified forms of academic engagement such as collaboration with faculty, personal formation through life experiences that have academic connections, and participation in activities that promote social involvement (NSSE, 2020).

Available literature supports the belief that university student community volunteering holds prospective benefits for student success. For example, Astin and Sax (1998) conducted a large longitudinal study to discover how participation in community service affected undergraduate students. The robust findings indicated that "participation in volunteer service… enhanced the student's academic development, civic responsibility, and life skills" (p. 255). Other literature connects university student engagement in volunteer community service with increased initiative (Carlisle et al., 2017), persistence (Pusztai et al., 2021), higher GPA (Collet-Klingenberg et al., 2015), increased disciplinary knowledge, self-confidence, and student-ascribed value to the larger university experience (Saville et al., 2022). Astin and Sax further found that student community service led to other types of engagement, including increased time invested in studying, accomplishing extra academic work, more contact with faculty, and plans for participation in future volunteer service opportunities (these outcomes are consistent with NSSE, 2020, indicators).

As Holmes et al. (2021) have shown, universities have employed a wide range of models to foster student volunteer community engagement ranging from service learning and university-community collaboratives to

one-time service experiences. Additionally, a variety of terminology is used to describe these various models (Paull et al., 2015). The variations of student experience challenge the reliability of board statements about the benefits of volunteering, pointing to the value of qualitative studies (for example, Weinronk et al., 2018) and mixed-method research (for example, Harkins et al., 2020) that explore student perceptions of volunteering in specific settings. Contextual analyses of student volunteer experiences can highlight beneficial trends and practices.

University Student Community Volunteering as Leadership Development

Self-perception and action as a leader can be viewed as a form of self-efficacy—a research-demonstrated benefit of volunteer engagement (Gonsalves et al., 2019). Self-efficacy was defined by Bandura (1995) as "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). Self-efficacy in leadership simply refers to such beliefs and actions that relate to influencing others. As Ritchie (2016) pointed out, self-efficacy is always contextually specific. As an illustration of this idea, a person may exhibit high levels of confidence in their ability to organize events but avoid making weighty decisions.

As an example of development cultivated by leadership opportunities, Good et al. (2000) shared powerful academic, personal, and interpersonal gains found with African American university students who served as peer mentors in an engineering program. Supporting the need for student leadership opportunities, Offermann et al. (2020) found that formative experiences for female college students in successful goal achievement and leading others correlated with subsequent professional leadership roles. In this vein, the SOAR Planning Team invited university student volunteers to give input in program planning, prepare to lead instruction, make instructional decisions, apply previous academic learning to new settings, take responsibility for task completion, accept recognition as program leaders, and serve as role models to high school students.

Prescribed University Academic Support Courses

The participants in the present study had formerly been enrolled in prescribed reading support courses (sometimes termed *developmental*). The university in this study uses multiple measures, with an emphasis on ACT scores, to place incoming first-year students in academic support classes for areas in which they are predicted to need support. According to the data reported by Complete College America (2017), 12% of students entering U.S. colleges take a developmental reading or English course.

There is a wide range of models that are labeled *developmental reading* (Stahl & Armstrong, 2018). This breadth of practice is important to recognize, considering discussions over the past few years on the potential harm of placing students in developmental courses (Valentine et al., 2017). The university discussed here employs a corequisite model pairing each credit-bearing reading class with a U.S. history course that fulfills a general education requirement. Corequisite courses have gained recent attention as promising alternatives to stand-alone prerequisite classes (Ran & Lin, 2022). Our curriculum design embraces high-impact practices that maximize student engagement (Kuh, 2008). Yet, none of this grants exemption from a need to be attentive to faculty perceptions of students enrolled in our prescribed courses.

The Freedom School Approach

I chose to model the reading portion of the SOAR academic outreach after past and present examples of liberating literacy education. Literacy education has long been associated with social justice movements. The Citizenship Schools initiated in the 1950s by Septima Clark and others that focused on education for voter registration were inspirational to the Freedom School movement of the 1960s led by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members. Freedom Schools relied on university student volunteer leaders to work with younger (typically middle and high school) students and provided alternative curricula not accessible to African American students of the 1960s (Chilcoat & Ligon, 1998; Watson, 2014).

The name *Paulo Freire* is anticipated in conversations on literacy education and justice because of his influential work in critical pedagogy. Watson (2014) pointed to parallels between Freire's critical pedagogies and the emphasis Freedom Schools placed on alternate curricula that served as a catalyst for social change. Chilcoat and Ligon (1998)

> University student community volunteer opportunities can offer environments in which students build confidence and develop practices that promote academic success.

highlighted the Freedom School foci on reflection on personal experience and student roles as dialog partners with teachers, ideas also connected with Freirean thought.

Contemporary Freedom Schools sponsored by the CDF (such as the one that I visited prior to SOAR) continue in the spirit of their predecessors by relying on university volunteers and weaving access to multicultural curriculum, themes of justice, and shared language and text experiences together to fill urgent educational needs that are exacerbated by failing schools (Jackson & Howard, 2014; Watson, 2014). The multiple facets of the Freedom School approach served to inspire the SOAR program design, particularly the reading component. I believed that the environment fostered would affect the university volunteers as well as the high school participants (as also suggested by Chilcoat & Ligon, 1998).

Faculty Taking an Anti-Deficit Approach with Students from Prescribed Courses

I propose that the model for recruiting students who have taken prescribed reading courses to lead as volunteers in an academic outreach is an example of action based on an anti-deficit educational approach. Faculty may perceive academic deficits in students based on race and ethnicity (Valencia, 2010), which can lead to discriminatory actions that affect student success (Park et al., 2022). This is pertinent to this study because first-year African American students at four-year institutions enroll in developmental English (including reading) courses at over three-and-a-half times (31%) the rate of White peers (8%) and Hispanic students (15%) are almost twice as likely as White students to be enrolled (Complete College America, n.d.). An anti-deficit perspective focuses on the strengths of students from minoritized demographics (Valencia) instead of assumed risk factors (Cooper & Hawkins, 2016; Exarhos, 2020).

There is scant research related to faculty perceptions of students enrolled in developmental or prescribed courses. In one notable phenomenological study, Hicks (2017) found a pattern of "chilly learning environments" (p. 84) reported by African American students who had successfully completed at least two prescribed developmental community college courses. The students described these courses as "extremely quiet, strained, non-participatory, uncomfortable, and unwelcoming" (p. 84). Terms commonly associated with student populations enrolled in developmental and prescribed courses, such as *underprepared*, *not college-ready*, and *at-risk,* give further credence to the inference that faculty may perceive students as less capable than peers not taking prescribed courses.

When faculty embrace anti-deficit perspectives, they imagine what students enrolled in their classes might contribute and achieve—rightly viewing the students as capable collaborators (Valencia, 2010). Faculty attitudes are important to student success (Vetter et al., 2019), and carefully designed and contextually appropriate practices are essential to changing deficit-based dynamics (Peck, 2020). This understanding provides a basis for inviting students who have taken prescribed courses to participate in the kinds of activities that have been widely demonstrated to promote student success. The design of the academic outreach program (particularly the literature circles) was also well-aligned with the anti-deficit paradigm—Chilcoat and Ligon (1998) noted that the Freedom School approach is, by its nature, anti-deficit.

In this study, I propose that the anti-deficit thinking modeled by faculty recruiting university students who had completed prescribed reading courses to serve as volunteer leaders has transformative potential. In opposition to the idea that university students who received reading support lacked capabilities in reading, most of the student volunteers in this study who had previously taken prescribed reading courses led literature circles. The volunteer opportunity facilitated obvious possibilities for university student volunteers to develop in ways that would contribute to student success.

Research Questions

I conducted this study to address the following questions:

1. How did university student volunteers believe that their experience with SOAR affected their sense of engaged belonging in the academic community?
2. Given that university student volunteers were placed in leadership roles in the SOAR program, how did this experience affect their confidence and self-understanding related to leadership?
3. Did the volunteer experience inspire participation or interest in subsequent community engagement opportunities?

Responses by university student volunteers addressed their perceptions of the effectiveness of a program that was designed as part of an anti-deficit model of education. Therefore, I additionally asked:

4. Does this study support the theory that an anti-deficit approach with students who had taken prescribed classes would have positive results in promoting student success?

Method

To address these questions, I chose a holistic single case study design because I believed that

the specific context of the academic outreach was integral to the potential outcomes of the study (Yin, 2018). Yin states that a case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon" (p. 15) where the phenomenon being investigated cannot be clearly separated from the context in which it occurred. The present study also focuses on students from a particular population—those who have taken prescribed reading courses. The model for the volunteer opportunity provided was uniquely designed with these student volunteers in mind. The study is revelatory as there is no known prior research on the effects of volunteer community service on students who have been enrolled in prescribed academic support classes. The case study approach allowed me to investigate and present the model holistically while emphasizing university student perceptions of the experience.

Participant Recruitment

In the spring of 2021, I sent an email invitation to the four university students who had previously taken a prescribed reading course and had additionally served as volunteers in the SOAR academic outreach. Three of these students agreed to participate in this study. Protocol approved by the university's Institutional Review Board was followed for inviting participants and collecting data.

Data Collection

Each participant who was recruited for this study was sent a survey composed of open-ended reflective questions as well as a short demographic survey to complete and return. The initial reflection questions were:

1. How would you describe your participation in SOAR 2020?
2. In what ways, if any, did your participation in SOAR 2020 affect your self-perception as a member of an academic community… (the specific university campus was referenced in this question)? You might discuss any changes in thought related to your courses, extracurricular activities, service, or possibilities for future activities that you would like to be involved in.
3. In what ways, if any, did your participation in SOAR 2020 affect your self-perception as a leader or one who has the capability of influencing others? Please give details in your response.

4. If given the opportunity, would you participate in a future service activity while still attending the university? Why or why not?

I conducted follow-up phone and ZOOM individual interviews within three weeks of receiving the surveys. Follow-up interview questions were based on the participants' responses to the initial survey questions. In these interviews, I sought participant elaboration (e.g., "Can you tell me more about…?") and clarification (e.g., "What did you mean by…?"). I took notes and, at times, repeated responses to the participants to ensure the accuracy of my understanding.

After the data were collected, personally identifying information was dissociated from student responses. In addition to the student interview and survey data, I used personal observation of the SOAR program in order to give context to the study.

Analysis

I used the first question in the survey to gain contextual information about university volunteer roles and activities and their feelings about them. This gave each study participant the ability to summarize their thoughts about the experience using their own terms.

I used the definition by Kuh et al. (2010) of engagement—"educationally purposeful activities" (p. 8)—to identify university student participation as members of the academic community. I considered activities referenced in survey items from the NSSE (2020) to be guiding examples. Because this study was focused at the level of self-perception, I considered stated plans and motivations as well as reported engagement experiences to be valuable data.

During the course of this study, my understanding of personal leadership development grew. Eisenhardt (1989) explained that while a priori theorizing can be helpful in shaping a case study, constructs may change during a study based on findings. The practice of beginning with theories but looking for clarity in particular areas fits in what Ridder (2017) called the "gaps and holes" design. I connected study findings with an existing theory to better understand the ways that two student volunteers felt that they developed as leaders. I began with the idea that leadership involved self-awareness of the potential to influence others and the confidence to act on this. In the paradigm of self-leadership described by Uzman and Maya (2019), one becomes a

> The study is revelatory as there is no known prior research on the effects of volunteer community service on students who have been enrolled in prescribed academic support classes.

leader by assessing and managing personal thoughts and behaviors to achieve life goals.

Adding the above paradigm to the concept of self-efficacy discussed earlier, I looked for the following indicators as evidence of growth in leadership: (a) university volunteer reflection on their own practices, (b) perception and affirmation of their own capacities for influencing others (achievement, decision making, and serving as role-models), and (c) action in accordance with these positive self-perceptions.

Although the survey question regarding interest in future engagement specifically referenced service activities, university student participant responses were indicative of additional types of engagement that they felt related to their work with SOAR. These responses were included in my discussion.

The answer to the fourth research question addressing the anti-deficit approach was largely interpretive. On the one hand, overall positive responses could be indicators of the effectiveness of the approach. However, I was specifically interested in any aspects of student responses that would indicate the uniqueness of this opportunity as a transformational experience in comparison or contrast with past experiences.

Methodological Integrity

The questions posed to the university student volunteers directly addressed perceptions—the specific phenomenon I was investigating. Yet, the conditions for seeking university student responses could have affected what was shared or omitted.

Having served as an instructor for the students who participated in the study and as a coordinator for the SOAR program, I was aware that my relationship with the participants in this study could influence responses. When I interviewed the university volunteer participants, I encouraged them to acknowledge any lack of positive effects with the assurance that their candid accounts were helpful for research. I also affirmed the possibility that they may have contributed positively to the program and perhaps enjoyed it (which was apparent from observation) without experiencing any profound personal benefits in the areas mentioned in the survey.

The specificity of responses and the depth of personal reflection, I believed, would serve as indicators of data validity. To verify the accuracy of my interpretations of and communication about their

experiences, the university volunteer study participants each reviewed a draft of the present article with the opportunity to provide feedback for correction or clarification

Findings

I have chosen to organize the findings by participant in order to present a holistic picture of each that combines demographic information and pertinent information shared.

Camille

Camille is an African American woman and a first-generation university student. She served in the program as a literature circler leader.

Describing her responsibilities, she said, "This program allowed me to step up and out of my comfort zone because I was able to lead four-to-five high school students." To prepare weekly, Camille shared, "I read my binder [which contained the curriculum], and although I did follow the steps, I altered it to [the high school students'] learning styles. I went further to ask them questions about their experiences."

Still responding to how she would describe her participation, Camille said, "I would describe my participation in the SOAR program with one word: *growth*." When asked in the follow-up interview how she grew, Camille replied, "Leadership, definitely—I knew I had skills in leadership and speaking. This experience allowed me to use these skills instead of just harboring them. I was putting my best foot forward for the greater good."

Responding to the question about SOAR's effects on self-perception as a member of the academic community, Camille shared that the diversity of the high school students in her literature circle helped her recognize the diversity of the university campus. She shared, "The students that I taught showed me that we, as students, are all different. We sometimes require different teaching styles based on the way we learn, and I've seen the same thing in students attending [the university]."

Camille also felt that her experience as a leader in SOAR affected specific academic practices. She elaborated in the interview, "[SOAR] helped me stop my procrastinating. I couldn't be a good example to the high school students if I fell behind. This helped me with time management. I bought a new planner and put things in time slots so that I wouldn't spend too much time on any one thing."

> Having served as an instructor for the students who participated in the study and as a coordinator for the SOAR program, I was aware that my relationship with the participants in this study could influence responses.

Camille reflected that she developed skills related to leadership and teaching. She stated, "This allowed me to take a step back and reassess my teaching style for the younger generations… Here I could observe everyone's learning style and help them learn according to their specific needs."

The motivational effect went further, according to Camille. Speaking on the topic of leadership in the follow-up interview, she said, "I was on this high, and after SOAR stopped [due to COVID-19], I didn't want to stop. I was already writing [a book] before SOAR, but SOAR helped me get back on the horse and finish." This correlated with the topic of leadership because the book is on personal success. Camille, indeed, has published!

Responding to the final survey question on participation in future opportunities, Camille said, "I truly enjoyed my time in the SOAR 2020 program. I liked the duration of time of each meeting and the book we read [referring to *Just Mercy* by Stevenson, 2018]. Along with our weekly guests [speakers], this was a great program, and each week was different but still interesting. I would not change anything." She affirmed that she would definitely be interested in another service opportunity because, in her words, "…while I was participating in this program, it improved my self-discipline and time-management skills. This helped make me a better student and allowed me to put my best foot forward."

As an additional thought shared in the interview, Camille stated that she was particularly inspired by one of the program's guest speakers—a woman who was African American and held a position in corporate leadership. Camille stated, "I really connected with her through her story. The following week at the end of our literature lesson, I mentioned the woman to my students, and, to my surprise, she resonated with another girl in the group. The experience gave us the courage to be something outside of what our parents expected from us…while still being successful."

Martin

A male student originally from Zambia, Martin has a family member who attended college in his country of origin. Martin helped with literature circles and math enrichment lessons and was excited to participate because, as he stated, "It reminded me how I was helped by college students in high school, and they taught me how I can be successful in college. Once we started our program with Dr. Nelson, I felt so happy to be able to share my college experience with kids in high school."

Writing on his self-perception as a member of the academic community, Martin stated, "the SOAR program shaped me in many ways that I didn't expect to be [shaped]. I was in a [literature] circle where I interacted with brave kids." He viewed SOAR as an opportunity to practice conversing in English. In the follow-up interview, Martin shared, "I found the weaknesses I had as a student and the strength[s] as a student." He believed that his communication skills improved as a result of the experience.

Martin shared an interesting story in response to the question regarding leadership, describing a subsequent opportunity that he took advantage of. Martin felt that participation in SOAR aided his courage to take the steps he described:

Last semester I was trying to find an opportunity for research. I was pushing… myself to reach out to those with big opportunities. It was impactful to me. After SOAR I was able to reach out to some professors who I would have been scared to reach out to as a freshman. I received an email from an academic mentor [who encouraged me] to apply for opportunities to teach elementary and high school students. I had confidence to apply for something that would improve my skills and experience. It would improve my teaching and being part of the larger community.

Martin shared that he would encourage the university to support more organizations like SOAR because this program "…shapes leaders and students to be different and accept who they've become."

Benjamin

Benjamin, whose story has already been shared in part, is a Caucasian male and is not a first-generation college student. As he reported about serving on the planning team, "We met to discuss logistics and brainstormed ideas as to how we can incentivize local students to participate in our program." Benjamin regularly attended planning team meetings and additionally worked with me to create and print flyers and organize logistics.

Regarding his role in the weekly SOAR sessions, Benjamin stated, "My primary role was to serve as an aid to professors and local teachers reviewing Algebra for local high school students. I helped students when they made algebraic errors while solving problems on their own. Outside of this role, I helped transport teaching supplies [to SOAR]."

Like Camille, Benjamin viewed his role in SOAR as a motivator for university coursework. In response to the survey question about self-perception as a member of the academic community, he stated, "…[SOAR] showed me that my mathematical and communicative skills have an impact on others;

therefore, my daily decisions and work ethic directly impact my community. It taught me that there's a correlation between my academic work ethic and how effective of a public servant I can be."

Addressing his self-perception of growth in leadership, Benjamin said, "My participation in SOAR was the first time that I had ever served in a leadership role. Prior to participating in SOAR, I had never envisioned myself as a leader in any capacity. After participating in SOAR, I not only envision myself as someone capable of leading, but someone who's significantly improved in areas that I struggled with while leading because I've been able to locate my weaknesses and focus on them."

Benjamin went further to explain that public speaking was an area that he chose to work to improve as a result of his experience. He attributed growth in this area to his volunteer experience, as can be observed in this response:

> Recently, I had to present part of a project at a podium in a lecture hall, and I was vastly improved after studying different speech techniques. Not only was I more confident going into the speech because I had practiced, but I was also an engaging speaker because I used hand gestures, made eye contact, and varied the pitch of my voice. I felt as if I deserved to deliver my message in front of the audience, and I would've never arrived at that point had I not accepted the opportunity to volunteer in SOAR and reflected on my performance.

After the experience with SOAR, Benjamin has sought other volunteer opportunities, although at the time of the survey and interview, he did not report participating in any. In a continuation of thought about future opportunities in the interview, he shared:

> Having an opportunity to directly help others overcome obstacles by providing your expertise, or simply reaching out a helping hand, is a blessing because it not only benefits the individual you're helping, but also yourself. I firmly believe that most of our underprivileged youth are capable of excelling in whatever field they choose, but they may not feel that way. They may not have been raised to be confident in themselves. With that being said, it's not only the moral choice to help… these individuals develop into who they want to become, but obligatory. Some of our youth may be one intervention away from aspiring to

be someone revolutionary, or from beginning to question the notion instilled in them that they're incapable. As someone who lived in the shoes of that struggling kid, I understand the importance of positive reinforcement and what that can spark. I can tell you firsthand that I have never encountered anything as difficult as overcoming an instilled lack of confidence, but when you have a community of individuals that reinforce you, it becomes much easier.

Noting that he used the term "underprivileged youth," it is important to mention that Benjamin viewed his own experience as similar to that of students recruited from the community. Though this perception is worth exploring, much of his help in planning SOAR was related to the fact that Benjamin grew up in the community from which we recruited and viewed his own opportunities as similar to those of participating youth.

Discussion

This study yielded some unexpected results. The unsolicited mention of particular communication skills, such as public speaking and English fluency, demonstrated the thoughtfulness and specificity of student responses. Beyond general feelings of growth related to service, university volunteer participants articulated unique areas in which they perceived benefit and were able to express concrete examples of how this impacted their lives during and after their time of volunteer service.

Perceived Effects on Engagement in the Academic Community

Two participants, Camille and Benjamin, reported increased academic motivation based on their perception of responsibility as role models. In these scenarios, it seems that leadership responsibilities affected academic engagement. Benjamin expressed a heightened awareness of ways that his academic skills in mathematics affected the high school students with whom he worked. It is not clear what Benjamin's reference to "daily decisions" (that impact others) included, but his perception of connections between the volunteer experience and his regular academic experiences was valuable to this study. He claimed to gain a higher appreciation of the relevancy of university academic work and attached this to his potential to affect the lives of others (benefits of value similar to those discussed by Saville et al., 2022). Interestingly, Benjamin also connected his academic and personal developments with community responsibilities —a transformative move that links volunteering, academic engagement, and citizenship.

Reflecting on Martin's comments connecting his desire to practice conversational English skills with his self-perception as a member of the academic community, I had a realization: Whereas other university volunteers connected honing communication skills with leadership, for Martin, the ability to converse with others in English (not his first language) was integral to his sense of belonging and also to engagement.

Martin addressed a topic in response to the survey question on leadership that I believe also speaks to academic engagement. He was offered a new opportunity after he reached out to professors—interaction with faculty is an indicator of engagement based on the NSSE (2020). Another NSSE indicator relates to having discussions with students from diverse backgrounds. Camille's discussion linking the diversity of learning styles that she experienced among SOAR participants to the diversity of the university campus seems to show movement toward engagement in this area.

Perceived Effects on Leadership

I had anticipated that responses would focus on self-understanding and levels of confidence, as can be observed in Benjamin's mention of a newly-developed self-perception as a leader. However, two responses pointed to an additional dimension. Camille seemed to indicate that she came to the program with a high level of self-efficacy: "I knew I had skills in leadership and speaking." Yet, when asked about the area in which she grew, she responded, "leadership," and added that she viewed SOAR as an opportunity to use her abilities. On the other hand, Benjamin felt that his communication skills improved after his recognition of an area of weakness in public speaking. These experiences are consistent with Uzman and Maya's (2019) theory of self-leadership—confidence to lead others is built, in part, through comfort in one's own skill levels.

Camille's in-depth description of her practices related to instruction was intriguing. She reported an awareness of diversity among learners in the literature circle she led and connected this with her attempts to diversify instruction. She demonstrated initiative in modifying and developing the curriculum and adapting her approach to meet the needs of her students. In these ways, Camille recognized her own professional capacities and acted on them. The combined university student volunteer reflec-

tions supported the idea that growth in leadership would be directly related to the roles in which the volunteers served (Ritchie, 2016). Camille's perceived growth as an educator is an example of this.

Inspiration for Student Future Engagement

Each participant expressed that SOAR was a positive experience and showed interest in future engagement. Two participants, Martin and Camille, shared specific post-SOAR engagement experiences and attributed some of their motivation for these to their SOAR experience. The opportunity that Martin pursued had similarities to the SOAR experience—it involved instructional leadership. Camille, on the other hand, found added energy to complete the manuscript for a book that she was working on—though not a volunteer opportunity, certainly a form of academically related engagement.

Additional Perceived Benefits

I observed that the guest speakers played an important role in the program for the high school participants and college volunteer leaders alike. We had to modify the evening schedule on a couple of occasions due to lengthy interaction between the speakers and participants (both college and youth). On at least one occasion, university student leaders spent additional post-session time conversing with a guest speaker. Camille's mention of the impact of one of these speakers on her and on a high school student in her literature circle added confirmation to our observations.

SOAR brought university students together with university faculty and community leaders (educators, artists, and a local pastor who also facilitates a campus ministry) as a team of volunteers. The university volunteers were respected as partners in this endeavor—their input and reflections were valued throughout the process. This is particularly demonstrated in Benjamin's participation on the SOAR Planning Team. The additional contact and collaboration with faculty and university peers outside of the classroom boosted the number of educationally purposeful activities fostered by the initiative (Kuh et al., 2010).

The Success of the Anti-Deficit Approach

Returning to the anti-deficit approach modeled in this study, I believe that the SOAR Planning Team's perception of the student volunteers' potential was accurate. Of the three university volunteer

> The unsolicited mention of particular communication skills, such as public speaking and English fluency, demonstrated the thoughtfulness and specificity of student responses.

study participants, the anti-deficit approach seemed to have the most transformative impact on Benjamin, evidenced by his expression, "Prior to participating in SOAR, I had never envisioned myself as a leader in any capacity." It seems that the recognition of Benjamin's potential, which led to the invitation to participate, positively impacted his self-perception. It is notable that he also served in more capacities than the other student volunteer participants. Benjamin's experience, along with the positive findings for all the university volunteers who participated in the study, speaks to the value of the contribution of this study.

Future Program Direction

The next step of this work involves creating a study circle (Nembhard, 2014) that includes community members who are intimately connected with the specific neighborhoods and schools (community volunteers from the pilot program would be good candidates) as well as university representatives. Using SOAR as a pilot, the goal will be to engage in critical reflection that moves toward addressing community needs in ways that are liberating.

I hope to involve university student volunteers who are recruited from prescribed reading courses for longer periods of their college careers, ideally beginning while they are still in the prescribed classes. I noted that prescribed reading courses at our university are linked with history courses. I envision more succinctly connecting the history curriculum with community engagement opportunities. For example, student participants would benefit from connecting the histories of Freedom Schools with creative planning for engagement.

Mindful of the ways that participants in the present study reported and valued personal growth in soft skills, I anticipate a mentoring model in which previous student participants or sponsoring faculty members will help newly recruited volunteers maximize the benefits of the experience. As an example, one participant suggested that members of a new cohort be encouraged to obtain and begin using planners prior to volunteering in order to organize time commitments from the beginning of their service.

Community volunteer service has far-reaching potential to promote engagement, raise questions for academic exploration, shape the interests of volunteers, and influence their sense of civic responsibility. This study testifies to the possibility and power of university educators imagining holistic models of discipline-based community service in which students are invited on a journey as collaborators and volunteers. In publishing this study, I hope particularly to encourage faculty to challenge

deficit perceptions and make directed efforts to include students who are currently or have been recipients of prescribed academic support.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

About the Author

Timothy S. Nelson, PhD, *is an assistant professor in the University Studies Department at Middle Tennessee State University, where he coordinates the University's Prescribed Reading Program. His research interests include pedagogies for contextual vocabulary and academic language instruction and disciplinary literacies.*

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9886-8961

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J-CASP CONVERSATIONS

The ACCelerator Advances Student Success Through an Innovative Learning Space at Austin Community College: An Interview with Curtiss Stevens

Jonathan Lollar, *J-CASP Associate Editor, Texas State University*

Camrie Pipper, *J-CASP Editorial Assistant, Texas State University*

ABOUT CURTISS STEVENS

Curtiss Stevens is the executive dean of the ACCelerator and Strategic Initiatives at Austin Community College (ACC). In 2019, Curtiss was awarded the President's Leadership Excellence Award and the John and Suanne Roueche Excellence Award for outstanding leadership, service, and dedication to ACC.

Curtiss holds a bachelor's degree in Geography from Valparaiso University, a master's degree in Geographic Education and Research from Western Michigan University, and pursued doctoral studies in Economic Geography at Indiana State University. He has amassed over 2 decades of experience in the field of higher education, serving in various capacities such as admissions and financial aid, student affairs, international education, academic and life skills training, grants and fundraising, curriculum, and athletics. His previous employments include positions at Valparaiso University, Western Michigan University, Indiana University, and Purdue University. Apart from teaching Geography and Geosciences, he has also worked as an Executive Director of a Boys & Girls Club and as a TV personality.

The ACCelerator at Austin Community College (ACC) Highland's campus is a 32,000-square-foot space that fosters dynamic learning. The ACCelerator features classrooms, study rooms, and numerous computer pod stations that can be reserved by ACC faculty and staff for a variety of purposes. The ACC Highland campus serves over 8,000 students, with over 17,000 student visits to the Highland ACCelerator per year. The ACCelerator features innovative teaching and instruction, learning support services, student support services, and community engagement, which provides an engaged student-centric customer service vision.

J-CASP: The ACCelerator is one of the largest postsecondary state-of-the-art community college teaching and learning technology centers and has become known for promoting innovative student engagement and individualized instruction. Being such a large space of 32,000 square feet (longer than a football field), how do the center staff and faculty members teaching in the center engage students at an individual level?

Stevens: We use a philosophy we call SEDI (Student-Engagement-During-Instruction). SEDI attempts to humanize the learning experience through student-teacher engagement during instruction. It could be as simple as asking a student, "How's your mom?" and the student responds with, "Oh, yeah, she's good." Interestingly, we find SEDI especially effective

with building relationships and engagement with our male students—and especially our minority male students.

J-CASP: What motivated this approach?

Stevens: I used to work as a valet at LaQuinta Inn. And one day, a couple of years after I quit, I ended up finding my valet handbook. The manual promoted aggressive hospitality by knowing and providing information to our customers. And so, I rewrote the

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Corresponding Author

Jonathan Lollar, Doctoral Student, Developmental Education
Texas State University
601 University Drive | San Marcos, TX 78666
Email: jel111@txstate.edu

whole manual to create our ACCelerator "customer service manual." It's called the ACCelerator & Strategic Initiative Customer Service Training. One of the concepts comes from a guide called The Seven Processes of Student Success. The first one is that student success happens when you feel welcome, recognized as individuals and that they matter to the institution. In fact, every staff member must pass our mandatory customer service training by 90% or above every year. Our intent is to facilitate aggressive hospitality and customer service with our students. Faculty members who are teaching in the ACCelerator tend to do well if they've completed the training, too. It's just amazing that regardless of whether it's math or any subject, it makes a real difference. That's why we are experiencing an increase in student persistence.

J-CASP: Speaking of math, the ACCelerator is credited with being the impetus for ACC's redesign of how developmental mathematics is taught to students. How did this redesign alter your developmental mathematic program?

Stevens: In 2014, ACC staff visited Virginia Tech Math Emporium (which uses computer-driven modular self-paced instruction supported by tutors and instructors). The center is large, maybe 20,000 square feet, and it's completely dedicated to math. After that visit, ACC decided to come up with our own technology center for math, whereby professors would facilitate student learning rather than lecturing. Now our math classes are seamless because students can walk in, turn the computer on, and boom, turn on ALEKS (Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces—an online learning platform using a blend of personalized instruction and traditional homework assignments). Students begin their instruction based on an initial ALEKS pre-assessment. As students are working with ALEKS, faculty, and tutors are moving around and facilitating—answering questions and providing additional support. Sometimes a faculty member may pull up a whiteboard to break down a question. Please note that if we have three classes being offered at the same time, we will have three faculty members. Each faculty member will also have four to five tutors working collaboratively with them, too. As you can see, we give lots of support to students.

J-CASP: Has this method influenced the way other courses are facilitated?

> This space is so adaptable, which is so impactful in terms of teaching.

Stevens: This space is so adaptable, which is so impactful in terms of teaching. I was sitting in the lab watching our math professors and thinking that they are fantastic at engaging students and facilitating learning. But why couldn't this be for everybody else? And that's when I ended up adding more subjects. I convinced a geography professor to teach in the ACCelerator and to teach the same class in the classroom. That way, we would compare the outcomes. By far, the students taking the course in the ACCelerator were more successful. One important aspect to note was that when these students took the class in the ACCelerator, they didn't have to pay for the $150.00 textbook, and we had no one withdraw from the course.

J-CASP: Does the ACC staff assist faculty who want to teach in this space?

Stevens: Right now, I have a website where it says, "Teach and Engage in the ACCelerator," so faculty can go in, make an appointment, and meet with one of ACC's instructional designers. They talk about how to break down the course and how to reserve the needed technology. We provide everything that instructors need to set up their courses. If instructors encounter any issues or problems, we are here all the time. Faculty members are completely supported with instructional design and course facilitation.

J-CASP: The ACCelerator has integrated academic coaches, tutoring services, career assistance, and Supplemental Instruction within the same space that students use to complete their coursework. Have you seen an increase in students utilizing or requesting these resources?

Stevens: The year before the pandemic, I had 5,400 students who were not enrolled in ACC coming in to use ACCelerator. They used to be ACC students because in order to use the computers, you have to have ACC access. This indicates how valuable students feel the ACCelerator is for them. Since the ACCelerator began in 2014, we've already been visited by 95,200 individual students. We're getting close to 100,000. We've experienced almost 1 million interactions. So, students come in whether they're using the study room, the open computers, or getting assistance.

J-CASP: How do you go about keeping students engaged at the ACCelerator once they arrive?

Stevens: I lived in Spain for 10 years, and one of the most amazing places to visit in Barcelona is the library. It's one of the busiest places that you can visit. And it's the same thing here; you're in the most popular and busy place at ACC. I never want students to leave this place. I don't want students to have to go out, get help, or get food and never come back. We're the only computer area that allows you to bring in food. The design is to support students because they need to be in one place where all of the resources are located.

J-CASP: How many resources have you managed to get into just the ACCelerator?

Stevens: In addition to tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, and academic coaching, we offer a variety of support specialists that help students with registration, financial aid, scholarships, and other issues. We did not offer academic coaching until we opened the ACCelerator. We're increasing the number of people that the students have connections with. We're helping to create student success. We're getting the student more resources, and they never have to leave the ACCelerator.

J-CASP: What about local resources? Tell us about some of the local partnerships that the ACCelerator has fostered.

Stevens: We have the youth camps, STEM camps, and Upward Bound. We've had Indeed (a service for job seekers) come in, and the Austin Police Department has rented office space to do testing. One of the cool ones is the Girl Scouts. The Girl Scouts come in on a Friday night and spend a night in the lab. About 400 girls bring their sleeping bags and come in and learn how to code and do robotics. This place is packed with about 200 volunteers, and it's amazing that it's here. And it's like, here's that community piece, that community outreach to bring them in.

J-CASP: ACC has 12 different campuses and reaches students across Austin and its surrounding areas. How many other campuses are expected to offer an ACCelerator lab for their students, and will these centers have similar access to tutors, academic coaches, Supplementary Instruction leaders, and career assistance in one large room like the original Highland campus ACCelerator lab?

Stevens: We currently have ACCelerators operating at three campuses. Highland was the first. Later we

Photo credit: Benji Smith

opened the Round Rock and then the San Gabriel campus ACCelerators. This summer, we'll open up ACCelerator at the Rio Grande campus, so that would be our fourth one. We are also in conversations to build five more ACCelerators, which we definitely have a need for. Pre-pandemic, we had 17,000 unique student visits at the Highland ACCelerator, 6,500 at the Round Rock ACCelerator, and almost 2,000 in San Gabriel. One of the coolest things is every time we look at the data, we say, "Okay, Highland campus has 8000 students who claimed this as their home campus, but Highland saw 17,000 unique students. Round Rock has 4,000 students who claim it as their home campus, but the ACCelerator saw 6,500 students. At San Gabriel, we had 1,000 students, but we saw 1,100." ACC students are coming from all over the district to use the ACCelerator. People are even driving all the way up from Hays County to come to use the ACCelerator. But each new ACCelerator will be customized to the size and resources that their campus needs.

J-CASP: Even with the size and resource differences, are there non-negotiables that each ACCelerator has to have?

Stephens: We need to keep the five core functions. Each ACCelerator has to have innovative teaching and instruction, learning support services, student support services, community engagement, and highly engaged student-centric customer service. The instruction has to be there because it gives faculty an alternate way of teaching, right? You want to

have wraparound services where you feel comfortable being in the space and walking in this space. The community has to be there, the services, the support, everything. It's non-negotiable because the five core functions are what make the ACCelerator a success for students.

J-CASP: I'm sure with more ACCelerators, you will be able to capture even more attention than you already have. The ACCelerator has had some high-level press coverage and visitors over the years. For example, Dr. Jill Biden visited the ACCelerator lab in 2015. What other high-profile individuals have visited the center?

Stevens: The Minister of Education from Kazakhstan came maybe 3 years ago when he was only a regional director. Since then, he's been promoted to the Minister of Education for the entire country. He just visited again as the Minister of Education because he'd been given $20 billion from World Bank to redo the entire education system in Kazakhstan, so he brought all the presidents of all their colleges with him on this trip to see different college systems in the United States. He went to Washington DC, New York, Chicago, and then Austin. He specifically brought them here to ACC because he remembered how great the ACCelerator was when he toured it a couple of years ago as a regional director.

J-CASP: That's incredible that the ACCelerator is getting international attention like this.

Stevens: We see the number of people who come in and visit, and it makes us excited. We just would not get Dr. Biden, the US Secretary of Education, representatives from other countries, and all these people coming in to see this space if we weren't doing what we do, right? They come in because we've been getting results and giving our students the best chance at success.

J-CASP: Did any of the ACCelerator technologies and training change during the pandemic? Covid-19 hit Texas particularly hard.

Stevens: After months into COVID, students sent a message saying, "I can't take online classes because I don't have Wi-Fi." ACC made the tough decision to ask me to open the ACCelerator during the pandemic.

> Each ACCelerator has to have innovative teaching and instruction, learning support services, student support services, community engagement, and highly engaged student-centric customer service.

J-CASP: I'm sure the logistics for that must have been its own challenge, on top of all the other duties your staff were having to assist with.

Stevens: In terms of equity and accessibility, we had some students that couldn't just sit in the parking lot with a laptop. We had to design a plan where it was one student per pod. We had to take chairs and block parts of the center off. And we could guide students specifically on where to walk and go. Luckily, we have an enormous amount of computer stations to space students throughout the center. Some of them, of course, just came in to get access to the Wi-Fi. They didn't need to sit at a computer; they just used study rooms or sat outside the ACCelerator. So, it was good that we opened up in case students didn't have access to technology or Wi-Fi.

J-CASP: Speaking of accessibility, how accessible is the ACCelerator? What steps have you taken to support students with disabilities?

Stevens: At ACC, we have an accessibility team. Even during class, when we have a student with a disability, someone hearing impaired or visually impaired, for example, someone will come and actually sit in class with the student and help them throughout the class. We also bought additional equipment and technology to assist students who need it. On all of the computers, for example, students have the ability to enlarge the screen. We also have headphones for people with hearing impairments. So we're 100% accessible to anybody coming to ACC. But we have to be. If we weren't, then it would get in the way of all the hard work we have done boosting persistence rates. The persistence of every student that comes here is important.

J-CASP: When speaking of persistence, ACC statistics reveal that seven or more visits to the ACCelerator lab increased first-time students' persistence by 4.6%+ (4.0%+ for full-time students, 5.5%+ for part-time students, and 7.6%+ for those least likely to persist). How has the ACCelerator's impact helped increase other student outcomes, such as completion rates for students seeking certificates and degrees?

Stevens: If a student comes to the ACCelerator just two times, they are automatically looking to continue next semester. When persistence starts

to increase, we see the success rates increase, right? And then, after the success rates increase, we start seeing more A's and B's. We start seeing a reduction in withdrawals and reductions in missing classes. Because now that students are in the ACCelerator, they have a faculty member engaging with them, and they are already sitting with a team at their station.

Based on a study we did, one interesting thing we noticed from a geography class is that when we would have two or three students who didn't need support sitting with one student who did, they would all pass. Why? Because they were in this group, and the group was like, "We in this together, we ain't going let you fail." We built a space that's designed to give that type of connection, engagement, and support.

J-CASP: Are there some more affect- and motivation-based support that the ACCelerator gives to students as well?

Stevens: I try to tell staff that I hire them to be cheerleaders. Many community college students come in with so many different things on their shoulders. So how do we celebrate them more? Schools always celebrate when you sign up for some college sports team, but no one celebrates when you get into a plumbing program. So, I created a registration station that has balloons right in the middle of the ACCelerator, and we can rally behind a student and be like, "Yeah. You got it. You got the class. You signed up." It costs nothing to give students that celebration and compassion. That impacts your persistence and success rates big time.

J-CASP: We wanted to thank you again for sitting down with us today to talk about the ACCelerator lab.

Stephens: I'm really excited to just get the word out more about all the amazing things we are doing at ACC, but especially with the ACCelerator.

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About the Authors:
Jonathan Lollar, MA, is a doctoral candidate in Texas State University's (TXST) Developmental Education Graduate Program. Jonathan currently serves as the student development specialist for the IDEA Center at TXST. His research focuses on developmental education policy, professional development models, learning frameworks course interventions, and correctional education. He is president of the Texas Chapter of the College Reading and Learning Association (TxCRLA). He was awarded the Texas State Doctoral Merit Fellowship in 2019, the Julia Visor Award from the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA) in 2021, and the Carol Dochen Professional Development Award from the Texas Chapter of the National Organization for Student Success (NOSS). Jonathan received a bachelor's degree in philosophy and religious studies from Valdosta State University in 2014 and a master's degree in applied philosophy and ethics from Texas State University in 2017.

Camrie Pipper, MA, is a doctoral student in Texas State University's (TXST) Developmental Education Doctoral Program. Her research focuses on student success interventions, first-year experiences, and fostering a sense of belonging that incorporates how intersectionalities can impact persistence and degree attainment in higher education. She is a proud native Texan and a first-generation student. She was awarded the TXST Doctoral Merit Fellowship in 2021, the Frank and Alice Christ Scholarship in 2021, and the Celebrity Classic Scholarship in 2022.

EXPLORATORY ESSAY

Using a Trauma-Informed Approach to Encourage Academic Help-Seeking Among Ethnically Diverse Students

Ashley M. Selva-Rodriguez
John K. Trammell
Michael Minutello
Rhonda Mudry

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ashley M. Selva-Rodriguez, EdD, *is an instructor and assistant director of Learning Support and Accessibility Services at the Dartmouth College Geisel School of Medicine, Hanover, NH.*

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3547-5914

John K. Trammell, PhD, *is a professor and chair of the Sociology, Criminal Justice, and Human Services Department at Mount St. Mary's University, Emmitsburg, MD.*

Michael F. Minutello, *is the academic support director at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, MA.*

iD https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7538-8762

Rhonda Mudry, PhD, *is an assistant professor and the director of the Cognitive Skills Program at Penn State College of Medicine, Hershey, PA.*

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The curvilinear relationship between academic help-seeking and the need for assistance is well-reported (Fong et al., 2021; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). Within the help-seeking literature, the complexity of help-seeking for ethnically diverse students has been explained by a few studies that cite cultural differences in self-regulation in general (Fong et al., 2017). However, using a trauma-informed lens to inform the field's understanding of how to encourage academic help-seeking among ethnically diverse students has been largely unexplored in higher education. By understanding the common factors that influence help-seeking and employing a trauma-informed approach to designing academic support services, institutions can be better positioned to encourage adaptive help-seeking behaviors that promote student success.

Unpacking help-seeking as a construct can shed further light on the mechanisms that impact help-seeking behavior. The literature suggests the help-seeking process is a social interactive self-regulatory strategy that can manifest in either maladaptive behaviors (i.e., help avoidance) or adaptive behaviors, such as instrumental help focused on asking for specific examples (Fong et al., 2021). There are generally three stages integral to any process of seeking help: (a) problem definition, (b) decision to seek help, and (c) actively seeking help (Featherstone & Broadhurst, 2003). These stages are influenced by individual and environmental factors. At the individual level, students with a mastery orientation and higher levels of self-efficacy seek support (Fong et al., 2018) because they likely define the problem of academic failure as one based on internal controllable factors, such as effort. However, a student's decision to seek support is also mediated by the educational environment. Students interact within academic microsystems (i.e., a variety of face-to-face meetings) and mesosystems (programs within the school) that influence their decision to access help (Sandars et al., 2014). In environments with a pedagogical focus on learning and improvement (Bardach et al., 2020), help-seeking is normalized and seen as a sign of personal development. As such, there are a range of complex and interconnected factors that impact whether a student will decide to seek academic support.

Among students who are ethnically diverse, the decision to seek academic help can also be explained by stereotype threat and behavioral economics. Stereotype threat is a social-psychological threat that emanates when someone is in a situation where a negative stereotype about their group applies (Steele & Aronson, 1995), such as an ethnically diverse female student taking a math exam. If ethnically diverse students perceive that academic support providers may hold negative stereotypes about their group, they are likely to avoid seeking help because they expect to be (or have been in the past) stigmatized (Winograd & Rust, 2014). These barriers can also be attributed to delay discounting in

Corresponding Author
Ashley M. Selva-Rodriguez, EdD
Department of Medical Education
Dartmouth College | Hanover, NH 03755
Email: ashley.m.selva-rodriguez@dartmouth.edu

behavioral economics. If there is a choice between the immediate gain of temporarily alleviating the discomfort of academic failure by avoiding seeking support or the delayed gains of seeking help, those under greater stress are more prone to the latter (Malesza, 2019). Consistent with the minority stress framework (Meyer, 2003), the decision to avoid seeking help may also be related to an increase in stress and decreased sense of felt safety (Purvis et al., 2013). Students may have experienced macro and micro-aggressions that can trigger a trauma response and therefore use maladaptive mechanisms to moderate the psychological distress (Hill & Hoggard, 2018). Taken together, for ethnically diverse students, help-seeking comes with a higher cost—highlighting the importance of engaging with students in a manner that is sensitive to trauma and the impact it has on help-seeking behavior.

Trauma-Informed Approach

Given that the cornerstone of effective academic support programs is cultivating trust (McClellan, 2014) and that many students from ethnically diverse backgrounds have experienced systematic oppression, a trauma-informed approach can shed new light on ways to encourage help-seeking behaviors. The main pillars of trauma-informed program design are: (a) developing safety, (b) promoting healing relationships, and (c) supporting self-regulation skills (Bath, 2008; Purvis et al., 2013). To develop safety, academic support programs can meaningfully engage ethnically diverse students by building knowledge of common maladaptive help-seeking behaviors. The messaging can be situated with transparency and validation of the historical context and injustices students have experienced. For example, programs can acknowledge institutional marginalization, structures of power, and the need for vital engagement with students in program design.

Developing Safety and Healing Relationships

Academic support programs can also promote safety and healing relationships by ensuring that help providers develop a consciousness of how they impact the advising process. Academic program directors can conduct a mid-year and end-of-year evaluation that includes gathering qualitative and quantitative data from faculty members, academic advisors, and students on perceptions of felt safety (Purvis et al., 2013). Additionally, academic program directors can coach help providers in engaging in self-reflection to ensure they are creating safe spaces that enrich student learning. By exploring how their identities, biases, and values impact

the advice that is offered, academic help providers can discover new ways of thinking to deepen the quality of student interactions. Providing academic support requires a pedagogy of care that honors each student's humanity and the desire to see them thrive by listening to and understanding their worldview (Aguilar, 2013). As such, this perspective entails understanding and valuing the whole person and how different aspects of their lives inform their academic performance (Aguilar, 2013). These mental models that emphasize holding unconditional positive regard for the learner can carve a path for belonging, which has been shown to be a strong predictor of academic success (Curtin et al., 2013).

Supporting Self-Regulation Skills

When there is a sense of felt safety and empathy, stress is lowered (Ciaramicoli, 2016), affording academic support providers the opportunity to empower students with strategies to improve self-regulation. Academic support providers can partner with students to create a schedule that includes rituals for effective self-regulated learning principles (i.e., 5 min of goal setting, 25 min of work, and 5 min of break time) and allot for engaging in activities that build academic capital or creating valuable relationships in an educational environment (Trammell, 2019). Additionally, to close the metacognitive equity gap or the lack of exposure to strategies in self-questioning (McGuire, 2021) that is common among ethnically diverse students, advisors can model how to use shorter break times to engage in metacognitive pauses that ensure optimal learning. A few key questions learners can ask are: What is happening? Is this what I want to happen now? If not, how can I change what I am doing to achieve the results I want? (Schön, 1983). By engaging in self-regulation skills, students engage in deeper thinking processes that can elicit behavior changes to improve their academic performance.

In brief, help-seeking behavior is impacted by a range of complex and interconnected factors (Fong et al., 2021), which are compounded for learners who are ethnically diverse. Using a trauma-informed approach that is grounded in promoting healing relationships and creating validation-rich environments (Rendón, 2021) can encourage help-seeking among ethnically diverse students. Academic support programs can research the impact of this approach on their services and create cross-movement solidarity that transforms students' lives. Such an approach can easily fit seamlessly with traditional tools in academic support.

> To develop safety, academic support programs can meaningfully engage ethnically diverse students by building knowledge of common maladaptive help-seeking behaviors.

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amanda.rittermaggio@texarkana.edu

EXPLORATORY ESSAY

Supporting Students on the (Academic) Margins: An Equity-Driven Framework

Emily Virtue
Erika Lytle Lett
Grace Cheshire
Diamond Brown
Whitney Gregory

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Emily Virtue, PhD, *is an assistant professor of Educational Research and the director of the Educational Leadership Program at Western Carolina University. Dr. Virtue has held various student affairs positions at different institutions of higher education and has been responsible for student wellness, activities, leadership development, retention, and community engagement. Her previous publications focus on pedagogical practices, supporting students in academic difficulty, and addressing systems that prevent student success in higher education. Her recent research centers on asset-based pedagogical practices in middle and secondary settings.*

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1466-9078

Erika L. Lett, EdD, *is the executive director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College. Dr. Lett has held numerous positions in the community college sector, including her roles as a faculty member, interim chair of the Communication Department, as well as chair of Academic Inclusiveness and Equity Initiatives. Her research interests focus on exploring how identity and culture influence instruction and policies, especially as those practices relate to the equitable treatment of people of color. She also enjoys examining communication practices of effective leaders in higher education.*

Grace Cheshire, EdD, *is an instructor of Human Communication at Western Carolina University. Dr. Cheshire has experience working in both administrative and faculty positions at the community college and university level. Her research interests as a scholar-practitioner focus on the*

intersection of communication and education, specifically through the lens of equity and social justice. She also enjoys exploring the connection between culturally responsive teaching and student sense of belonging, as well as faculty cultural competence and communication in predominantly white institutions.

Diamond Brown, MA, *(she/her) currently serves as the AU core assessment analyst at American University. Both in her current role and previous ones, she has held a keen eye for working smarter while improving equitable student experiences. Through various opportunities she has been able to support students individually, focus on teaching practices as an instructor, and offer support to colleagues. Prior to AU, Diamond worked in the Office of Student Retention at Western Carolina. Her work focuses on the intersection of individual relationships centered on empathy, compassion, and big-picture thinking.*

Whitney Gregory, MEd, *serves as assistant dean of students at Elon University. With over 16 years of experience in higher education, she previously held leadership roles in the areas of health promotion, student care and outreach, and student conduct. A 2022 recipient of the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award for excellence of character and service to humanity, Gregory has focused her career on advancing holistic wellbeing, restorative practices, and equity-driven processes to center student voices and experiences. Gregory is currently pursuing a doctorate in educational leadership at Western Carolina University.*

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Though many colleges and universities claim to be driven by missions that highlight access, equity, and student success, academic policy and practice do not always mirror these claims. American higher education institutions are "obsessed with smartness" (Astin, 2017), yet fail to support educational attainment in an equitable manner. Educational inequality has its roots in PK–12 education (Dorn, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2007) particularly as it relates to deficit ideology. The manifestations of deficit ideology in higher education are most starkly seen in how students on academic warning (also

Corresponding Author
Emily Virtue, PhD, Educational Leadership
Western Carolina University
91 Killian Building, 210-B | Cullowhee, NC 28723
Email: evirtue@wcu.edu

referred to as academic probation) are treated both in action and by policy. For higher education institutions to meet their missions for access, equity, and success, they must address how their "systems of support" perpetuate deficit thinking. As the nature of higher education and the demographics of those enrolled continues to change and diversify, the time is right for higher education practitioners to interrogate and change harmful practices. We offer a framework for how institutions can build capacity for academic support program staff to identify deficit practices that systemically perpetuate inequities, so we no longer hinder student growth and academic success.

Deficit ideology, as defined by Gorski (2011), is a "worldview that explains and justifies outcome inequalities by pointing to supposed deficiencies within disenfranchised individuals and communities" and "discounts sociopolitical context, such as the systematic conditions (racism, economic injustice, and so on) that grant some people greater social, political, and economic access, such as to high-quality schooling, than others" (p. 153). Students entering American colleges and universities have been raised in educational systems steeped in deficit-based practices and surrounded by deficit-based speech. Standardized tests pit students against one another, highlighting few who are "smart" and relegating others to "career-ready" tracks that suggest students do not have what it takes to succeed in postsecondary education. Despite the growing literature outlining the benefits of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and asset-based thinking (Ayala & Contreras, 2019; Duran et al., 2021; Garcia et al., 2021) higher education's collective practices and policies remain focused on what students lack rather than what our systems and employees can do to address our own biases and systemic inequities.

Inherent in our understanding of a university's role in student success (or lack thereof), is the organizational structure on which our offices are built. Most colleges and universities operate under structural functionalism. Structural functionalism "focuses on efficiency" and centers on approaches that are bureaucratic, reliant on "top-down" leadership, and are "not oriented toward equity" (Capper, 2019, p. 4). Organizationally, higher education thrives on bureaucracy, order, and staying within the lines. One can see the effects of structural functionalism in how students on academic warning are

treated. Students are often given strict parameters to "return to good standing" that include cumbersome policies, procedures, and unrealistic goals—all of which are devoid of an acknowledgement that students are complex beings who have found themselves in academic difficulty for a variety of different reasons. Knowledge acquisition, arguably higher education's primary directive, is not orderly. To deny the reality of student circumstances is to maintain systems that perpetuate oppression and stymie success.

Gatekeeping systems for students are grounded in structural functionalism—that is, policies and guidelines that drive the higher academic system are rigidly objective. Versalle (2018) found that students often do not understand their proximity to dismissal when they are put on warning, and as such do not appropriately change behaviors. While almost every institution of higher education has some form of academic warning or probation policy, these are often grounded in a *sink-or-swim mentality* that assume academic success and persistence are the choice of the student (Cherry & Coleman, 2010). Rather than an opportunity to identify students in need of enhanced support or other interventions, some institutions may frame their policies as an opportunity to ensure the academic prestige of a university by "retaining only talented and motivated students" (Cornelisz et al., 2020, p. 2176). Academic probation without any other intentional interventions has an extremely small impact on academic improvement and persistence (Sneyers & DeWitte, 2017). Thus, structural functionalist policies perpetuate the cycle of blaming the student who is struggling, failing to provide appropriate interventions, and then affirming deficit ideology by dismissing the student as "untalented" or "unmotivated."

We offer a new framework built upon critical epistemologies that would require systems to move beyond structural functionalism to a more student centered, whole-person approach to academic success. This new framework will allow practitioners to be more conscious of their epistemologies and eschew structural functionalism from their practices. First, we provide a review of the ways in which students on academic warning have been treated, including how students arrive at academic difficulty. We then present a model for student affairs professionals to use in order to better support struggling students.

> We offer a new framework built upon critical epistemologies that would require systems to move beyond structural functionalism to a more student centered, whole-person approach to academic success.

Students on Academic Warning

Traditionally, students on academic warning are seen as a problem to be fixed—a perspective that places much (if not all) of the blame on the student's behavior. These deficit-based beliefs, combined with a lack of appropriate support, result in negative outcomes, particularly for those who hold underprivileged identities and are at a higher risk of attrition and endure substantially more obstacles to academic success (Brost & Payne, 2011; Monroe, 2022; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Academic warning is particularly treacherous for students who come from marginalized backgrounds, especially first-generation students, students of color, and students with lower socioeconomic status (Frink, 2021; LeSavoy, 2010; Ramos & Sifuentez, 2021). Additionally, first-generation students have been found to have less successful outcomes than their second and continuing-generation peers. Researchers often point to a lack of academic preparation as an indicator for poor outcomes (Higgs et al., 2021), thus placing the blame on the student and effectively reducing positive expectations of students based on performance measures that were the fruit of deficit-based systems. Due to the systemic barriers that create challenges for marginalized students, being placed on academic warning can negatively impact students' academic identity and ability to cultivate academic success (Robinson & Beach, 2019). Students may internalize these narratives, believing they have failed and espouse a negative academic identity based on shame (Virtue et al., 2020). Recent research, however, has moved beyond focusing on academic preparation as the reason for difficulty and highlighted social, emotional, and mental health concerns as factors that lead to poor academic outcomes (Bledsoe, 2019; Versalle, 2018).

Theoretical Perspectives

In this section, we outline the three major theoretical perspectives that influence our framework. In each section, we demonstrate how deficit-based ideologies and practices have influenced traditional approaches to student support.

Student Development

Academic institutions are tasked with ensuring students who matriculate are able to successfully earn their degree. Many student development theories suggest that student engagement, retention, and persistence can be directly correlated to deficit-based ideology. Here, we focus on Schlossberg's (1989) mattering and marginality theory to articulate the weight deficit-based ideology carries as an obstacle to student success for our most vulnerable students.

Schlossberg's (1989) theory focuses on the relationships students form and maintain during their college experience wherein they feel as though they matter to or feel marginalized by others. Marginality is defined "as a sense of not fitting in that can lead to self-consciousness, irritability, and depression" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 518). Students who are considered the most academically disadvantaged, including but not limited to racial and ethnic minorities, first-generation, and students from lower socioeconomic statuses are most likely to feel the effects of marginality. It is no coincidence that students who are categorized into groups commonly marginalized on college campuses also have lower rates of academic success and higher attrition rates (Simpson, 2016). Previous research has shown that students on academic warning or those labeled as *at-risk* or *underprepared* can feel marginalized because their performance, and therefore their identity, is labeled as *less than* and different from their peers (Mann, 2008; Virtue, 2019). Stigmas and stereotyping attached to such labels support a deficit-focused environment that decreases the probability students on the academic margins will seek support. Systematically, higher education and its employees have played significant roles in students' academic performance. Yet, practitioners often talk about solving these poor outcomes as the job of the student rather than critically reviewing the educational system.

Deficit ideology can trap students on academic warning in a cycle of poor performance. Students underachieve, and staff react as though the student was destined to do so. Staff cultivate an atmosphere that indicates a lack of belief in and support for the student, mired with policy and additional requirements that can overwhelm an already stressed student and result in continued poor performance. Research has shown that students can harbor these negative views of themselves and thus believe they cannot accomplish challenging academic tasks (Cherry & Coleman, 2010; Vyvial, 2021). Such deficit-based practices maintain a system that further marginalizes students and substantiates factors that push students to leave a university. These practices and attitudes maintain inequitable systems that privilege high-achievers and marginalize those who struggle.

Sense of Belonging and Culturally Relevant Practices

Non-instructional staff are positioned in front-facing roles that offer opportunities to build important relationships with students. However, those who operate from a deficit-based lens and victim-blaming mindsets present a barrier for crucial relationships to form (Hlinka, 2017). Previous research has determined "educators that have direct contact with students play an important role in creating students' sense of belonging" and that cues about

whether or not a space is welcoming can directly from faculty and staff (Hurtado et al., 2015, p. 73). Students' histories inform the identities they carry into the institution, which is why culturally relevant practice (see Byrd, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2011) remains critical to building sense of belonging and subsequently supporting students facing academic probation.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) provides guiding principles for this work as it offers the opportunity to confront deficit-based practices and better support students facing academic difficulty. Developed by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings in the early 1990s, CRP focuses on three pedagogical tenets: academic success, cultural competence, and a critical sociopolitical consciousness (Larke, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011). CRP was first presented with teachers in mind, though much of this work can cross-functional areas and be used in practitioner settings as well. Because this paper is aimed at those in student support positions, we use the term *practices* rather than *pedagogy*. Academic success relates to an educator's[1] environmental[1] awareness and management. Not only must educators know their subject matter, they must also uphold strong academic expectations while making the content relevant to students. Cultural competence refers to an educator's ability to know the student and their background and incorporate those backgrounds into the learning materials so the student sees themselves reflected in what they are learning while being educated about larger ideas in a safe environment (Ladson-Billings, 2011). The level of cultural competency demonstrated by an educator regarding students' backgrounds can make all the difference in their achievement and success, especially for those students on academic probation (Carales & Hooker, 2019; Hlinka, 2017; Hutto, 2017; Martinez & Munsch, 2019; Miller & O'Daniel, 2019; Wood, 2014; Wood & Turner, 2010).

Welcoming, embracing, integrating, and celebrating students' culture is a way to increase sense of belonging for marginalized students (Carales & Hooker, 2019; Martinez & Munsch, 2019).

> Deficit ideology can trap students on academic warning in a cycle of poor performance.

Finally, critical social consciousness is a pedagogical approach that encourages teachers and students to critically examine the sociopolitical issues that affect the world—this aspect more than the three others is what we are calling practitioners to explicitly do in practice. Moreover, using this critical lens, students should feel compelled to challenge the status quo that perpetuates inequitable outcomes for certain groups of people (Byrd, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2011). CRP practices are particularly important to implement for students who are on warning because such choices will signal to students that their professors know them and are willing to work with them, rather than just expect requirements to be met independent of one's personal struggles.

An Equity-Focused Framework of Support

Student success is inextricably linked to environmental factors, particularly those related to pedagogical practices and faculty and staff attitudes. Though American higher education institutions have seen an increased call for equity on campus, those platitudes are often met with surface-level programming that does not weave into the fabric of our pedagogical practices or change the climate for how some students are perceived. Such practices are still opt-in: if an educator feels so inclined, they may enact equitable practices, but most are in no way obligated to make change. This remains most evident in institutional norms regarding students in severe academic difficulty. Deficit-focused practices (both at the institutional and personal level) often prohibit success and can actively work against student progress.

In order to see visible change in our students wherein academic success despite difficulty is possible, we offer a new framework. The equity framework (see Figure), which uses mattering and marginality as its foundation, prioritizes identifying and eliminating systematic barriers which may increase student sense of belonging and academic success—note that asset-based ideology encompasses the figure to demonstrate how these beliefs must permeate each aspect of the work. The framework presented below should serve as a minimal expectation for those working with students in academic difficulty; however, we posit that institutional change is unlikely to occur unless all educators reframe their thinking and practices in this manner. This framework, at its core, asks

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[1] We use "educator" as a blanket term for both faculty and staff working in higher education because all support personnel are at some level educating students

[2] Environment refers to any space in which a practitioner has control/authority such as a classroom, office space, etc.

faculty and practitioners to take back the onus of educational responsibility. For too long, our systems have glorified educational autonomy and, when necessary, used it as a scapegoat for poor academic outcomes. We suggest that using this framework will shift perspectives from deficit thinking (e.g., "Our students are failing; therefore, they need to change") to systemic thinking (e.g., "We're failing to prepare our students. How can we change?"), ultimately resulting in more equitable practices for students on the academic margins.

Figure
An Equity-Based Framework of Support

Note. This figure demonstrates how the connection between student development, the reframing of deficit ideology, and culturally relevant pedagogy influence sense of belonging and student academic success.

Student Development

In order for staff to reframe their thinking about student success, they must understand basic concepts related to student development theory. In particular, it is vital to acknowledge where students may be developmentally as they progress through their collegiate career. Traditional-aged college students continually undergo developmental growth throughout their journey in higher education—they do not arrive on campus with the necessary development required to achieve in all aspects of their collegiate experience. Astin (2017) rightly argued our obsession with "smartness" ignores the developmental milestones that are pivotal to student success.

Goldrick-Rab & Strommel (2018) summarized a common lamentation faculty express: students do not meet their expectations. When students fail to reach expectations, institutions with deficit-focused mindsets create additional barriers to persistence for students in poor standing. If our students are not where we want them, it is incumbent on us to get them there. Rather than focus on failure at the individual, student level (which Valencia [1997], described as a deficit-based practice), we ought to look at failure from a system level with regard to pedagogical practices. Students, after all, are enrolled in institutions of higher education to learn—the expectation that they arrive on our campuses already knowing how to learn and succeed is nonsensical. Not only should we understand that developmentally students entering college have learning to do, particularly about how one can succeed in higher education, they should be paired with the strongest teachers. Lopez (2019) rightly argued that first-year students and those who need the most guidance ought to be taught by those with the most experience. She reminds us that students meet our expectations and suggests we set expectations "high and meet them on the summit to address the challenges they may encounter rather than lament and wallow in the trenches" (p. 69). To accomplish this goal, pedagogical shifts must take place wherein the expectation of instructors is centered on ability and potential rather than perceived deficits.

In practice, we need to consistently provide students with individualized solutions rather than supplying generic, catch-all advice. This may include creating classes or workshops that specifically teach students how to study and prepare. Such skills should be proactively taught to all students rather than reactively to students who have been identified as on the cusp of failure. Traditionally, these skills are offered for those who lack in some way (i.e., "if you don't know how to study, go ask the Learning Center for help"). Articulating support services as an extension of skills students currently have, however, shows how they can build on their assets rather than highlighting deficits (i.e., "learning these skills will strengthen the way you approach critical problem solving").

Adopting Asset-Based Beliefs

Disrupting deficit-focused processes will require staff to examine their own practices and biases. These concepts may be new and uncomfortable for many yet can serve as the cornerstone for change. Institutional leaders will need to engage in an examination not only of their practices (and those of their employees) but of the policies in place that prioritize efficiency over student success. For example, cumbersome, one-size-fits-all requirements (such as semester-specific GPA and completion rates or additional class requirements) can place undue stress and harm on students who are eager to succeed. Examining the purpose of these requirements, and more importantly, identifying who the policy benefits should be of chief concern. To suggest that students are deficient diminishes their spirit and sends

a message to them that the institution places its belief in an inequitable system over the belief that students can succeed.

It is essential for educators to reframe their deficit thinking and practices to those that are asset-based such as focusing on a student's cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and aspirational capital (Ayala & Contreras, 2019; Garcia et al., 2021). At the individual level, educators must examine their expectations of, and communication with, students. Those in student support roles are often the employees who communicate readily with students on warning by explaining status, appeals processes, and conditions required to return to good standing. In each interaction, staff can communicate deficit-based beliefs or asset-based beliefs. The distinction here is noteworthy because it may very well set the tone for how students expect to be treated moving forward. If a staff member/administrator burdens the student with nothing more than deadlines, expectations, and a complicated web of how to "get out," it is likely the student will see the status of being on warning as process-based and may not understand where help may reside. Further, if communication is not student-centered to the individual, the student may sense they are alone in their academic situation—while someone may help navigate the technical aspects, the process could feel cold, devoid of support, and perhaps even derogatory. To ameliorate these negative outcomes, staff should take an individualized approach: understand how the student arrived on warning (it's likely not the cause of academics alone! See Bledsoe, 2019; Brost & Payne, 2011; Versalle, 2018), help the student identify their own academic assets, and co-construct a plan with the student to navigate the requirements to return to good standing, including items such as choosing appropriate classes, proactively scheduling support services such as tutoring or mental health support and starting each meeting with the student based on what has gone well.

Culturally Relevant Practices and Sense of Belonging

Research indicates that faculty implementing culturally relevant pedagogy into their classrooms promotes positive gains for students, including increasing their sense of belonging and mattering (Bryd, 2016; Carales & Hooker, 2019; Eagan & Kezar, 2008; Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020; Miller & O'Daniel, 2019; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Strayhorn, 2009; Wood & Turner, 2010). These practices can be used outside of the classroom as well. When advising students who either have been placed on academic warning or are likely to be given probation status at an institution, the use of culturally relevant practices by advisors becomes even more crucial. Research demonstrates that students spend just as much time interacting with staff—including advisors, retention officers, and support services staff—as they do with their classroom instructors (Duggan, 2008; Gibson-Harman et al., 2002). These front-serving roles offer vital opportunities to utilize culturally relevant practices to foster belongingness, despite probation status.

As staff members foster environments that acknowledge and embrace the myriad of cultural backgrounds of their students and demonstrate culturally relevant practices, the factors that contribute to the lack of sense of belonging for students on the academic margins can be minimized. In practice, this may include advisors learning more about the student, their goals, and family expectations and obligations related to their education. Studies indicate that individual guidance based on care and support can increase positive outcomes (Arcand & Le Blanc, 2012; Capello, 2019). For example, practitioners may center student identity as a positive indicator of success (see Simpson, 2016). Additional examples of using culturally relevant practices for those in advising roles include:

1. Devoting time to understanding the student's background. Without this first step, finding the right culturally relevant practices will be difficult. For example, some students who are caregivers or working might need to know what nontraditional tutoring options exist. Or students from different religious backgrounds might need help communicating with their instructors around holidays not observed on campus.
2. Knowing what resources on campus might benefit students on warning, such as tutoring centers or counseling services (this involves having the location of these services and the hours of operation, as well as who to contact).
3. Offering to network between students to create mentorships on campus, especially involving students who have successfully navigated the academic warning system in the past.
4. Taking the lead on reaching out to other resources on campus and including the student on the email/phone call to facilitate communication directly between the student and others. This approach models how to communicate professionally for students who might be uncomfortable or lack this knowledge while lending your credentials to ensure the student's needs are met.
5. Checking in with the student more than once a semester at advising times (special care should be taken around religious holidays, the midway point in the semester, after any academic breaks, etc.).

6. Being honest and realistic with students on academic warning. Students may be inclined to take on heavier loads or face steep uphill climbs to lose their probation status, so it is vital that advisors are mindful of student assets, as well as areas for continued monitoring. This may involve encouraging students to set realistic goals in terms of credit hours and classes they are enrolling in for future semesters.

The importance of being aware of avoiding deficit mindsets as advisors and educators through culturally relevant practices can help shift the narrative from judgement for *not having* college-ready students toward empathy and a willingness *to be* student-ready colleges. Furthermore, educators who continually work on their cultural competency by engaging in authentic and affirming practices to support students are also able to dismantle their own deficit thoughts, which can maneuver students away from the risk of being placed on academic warning.

Conclusion

As college student enrollment will continue to diversify and student enrollment to reflect those who have experienced years of trauma connected to life and schooling in a global pandemic, our hope is academic support offices will take a deep look and change practices to better support all students, particularly those who find themselves in academic difficulty. We encourage educational leaders to use this model to better prepare student affairs professionals to support their most vulnerable students. Each college and university system has a unique system to work with students on warning, yet our argument is for all: without addressing deficit-based ideology wherein students feel as though they belong and matter and are taught/mentored/advised in culturally appropriate ways we will never see lasting changes to our students or poor academic outcomes.

Ultimately, creating more equitable outcomes for students in academic difficulty requires structural change to how our institutions view and subsequently support these students. In order to build a more comprehensive approach to caring for students on the academic margins, the process must first begin with self-reflection on a personal level to identify, examine, and confront deficit ideology in our thoughts and practices. The development of individual critical consciousness must happen before the inequities enshrined in our policies and procedures at the institutional level can be addressed. Pivoting to a model of caring for all students in our institutions requires us as practitioners to move beyond an obsession with "smartness" and toward the recognition that every student has potential, and our role is to foster and nurture that potential. Without undertaking this crucial work, our most vulnerable students will continue to be unfairly trapped in a cycle of inequity that is essentially of our own design.

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