AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Vikki L. Rennick for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education presented on September 15, 2005.
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Rich Shintaku

This is a phenomenological research study of the lived experience of women student mentors at one community college located in an urban setting on the West Coast. The study participants were women students who served as mentors to other women at the community college who are participants in a returning women's program. The researcher interacted with the study participants over a nine-month time period. Interviews were held with the six mentor participants prior to their mentoring experience, during the time of the mentoring experience, and at the end of the mentoring experience. The data for this study consist of interviews, observation, and field notes. The mentoring program coordinator was also interviewed to provide for triangulation of data.

Six themes emerged from the interviews with the participants and subsequent analysis of the data:

- Reflecting on past experience
- Wanting to help
- Setting and maintaining boundaries
• Experiencing strong emotions
• Relational support from other women
• Mentoring as a reciprocal relationship

The resulting implication for practice recommendations from this study for community college administrators and student service professionals designing or implementing mentoring programs are:

• Provide training for mentors
• Provide ongoing support for mentors
• Offer an orientation for the mentees on responsibilities and expectations
• Design the mentoring program to provide a full academic year for the mentor-mentee pair to meet
• Provide benefit and rewards for serving as a mentor
• Ensure adequate staffing of the program

Recommendations for further research on student mentoring are provided. They include additional research in the areas of women as student mentors, men as student mentors, comparison of the experiences of male and female mentors, retention studies on students who serve as mentors, college credit and training for mentors, mentoring programs across individual college campuses, and a statewide view of mentoring programs on college campuses.
The Lived Experience of Women Student Mentors

by

Vikki L. Rennick

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Vikki L. Rennick, Author
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The Lived Experience of Women Student Mentors

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Mentoring is an ancient practice that has seen a surge in popularity during the past ten years. Formal mentoring programs are increasingly being implemented on college campuses in an effort to boost student retention and to provide additional student support services. In recent years, utilizing students to serve in the role of mentors to other students has been on the rise. While there is an abundance of information related to mentoring in various settings and its impact on the individual being mentored, there is limited information available on what the experience is like for the mentor.

Studies related to student mentoring are often about the experience of the student who is receiving the mentoring services (the mentee). This research is not; it is about the experience of the mentor. Specifically, this study is about the lived experience of women community college students who volunteer their time and energy to support other women students.

The description of the mentoring experience in this study is provided by the participants themselves, and enables the reader to hear their “voices” as they share their experience as mentors. The community college program where the women
serve as mentors, the Returning Women’s Program, is designed for women who are displaced homemakers, low-income, first-generation college students, or a combination of these factors. The mentors are themselves graduates of this program who have gone on to successfully complete coursework and develop leadership skills. These are women who are often marginalized by society. They joined as participants in this study to provide insight to their lived experience as mentors.

In the act of mentoring two people join together on the same path to share experiences and actions that can change the future of each. The wisdom shared by the more experienced person in the pair is given to help the less experienced person on their journey. Many authors on the subject of mentoring refer to Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, as the first mentor in Homer’s epic tale, *The Odyssey* where she took the guises of Mentor and Mentes and assisted Telemakhos on his journey to find his father Odysseus (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995; Colley, 2002; Daloz, 1999; Hegstad, 1999; Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Mott, 2002; Mullen, 1998; Murray, 1991; Rhodes, 2002; Shea, 1997; Wadsworth, 2002; Zachary, 2000).

Additionally, publications specifically on women and mentoring often refer to the sharing of wisdom, the theme of a journey, reciprocal learning, and the relational aspects of “women’s ways” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) and “women’s way of mentoring” (Christenson, 1999; Dahle, 1998; Moss, 2001). Wiltshire (1998), when writing about women mentors, states “mentors, those companions for the journey who give us the courage to be who we are.”
Focus of the Research

This qualitative research study focuses on the lived experience of women students who serve as mentors for other women students in a community college setting. Using the phenomenological approach, it strives to provide a deeper understanding of what it is like to be a woman student mentor. Phenomenological research looks at the lived experience and strives to capture the essence of that experience (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998).

The study was designed to interview each woman student mentor three times over a nine-month period. The process of in-depth interviewing using open-ended questions was used to assist in capturing the essence of the participants' experience (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 1998).

The experience of college students who serve as mentors is a relatively unexplored area of research. The limited literature on college student mentoring programs focuses primarily on retention programs for historically underrepresented ethnic minority students (Clements, 2000; Kennedy, 2000; Szelenyi, 2001). In addition, a few studies address the experience of college faculty who serve as mentors to students. Most of the literature on the experience of the mentor is found in the area of youth mentoring programs, corporate mentoring programs, and mentoring programs that are specifically related to training for new teachers and nurses. A body of literature is beginning to emerge related to the experience of the mentor in a college setting (Bressler, 2005; Calkins & Kelley, 2005; Kennedy, 2000; Krull, 2005; Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2002).
Significance of the Research

The significance of this study is four-fold. First and foremost is the opportunity to learn about the lived experience of students who serve as mentors to other students. Second, this study expands the limited research on the experience of women student mentors. Third, this research gives voice to the experiences of women student mentors who are graduates of a program that serves as an entry point for low-income, displaced homemakers, and first generation students. Fourth, this research study adds to the body of literature and research on the impact of mentoring on student retention—in this case, retention of the mentor.

Individuals who have conducted research in the related areas of mentoring have called for additional studies. Bressler (2005) who conducted a research study to explore the motivators for mentors, and their perceptions regarding mentoring relationships in higher education fields proposed “further qualitative and quantitative research from the mentors’ perspective is critical as the body of knowledge in this area remains small.” Kennedy (2000), who studied mentors and mentees at a community college program recommended that further “research should be conducted regarding peer mentoring programs in an academic setting to promote a better understanding of the dynamics and results of the relationship.” Moss (2001), who interviewed women mentors, suggested that a study be designed to study how personality types affect the mentor’s style, or how personality types affect the mentoring relationship.
Questions Guiding Inquiry

There was one overarching question guiding this inquiry:

1. What is the lived experience of women students who serve as mentors to other women students?

Additionally, two related questions were explored:

1. What issues do women students who mentor encounter in the mentoring experience?

2. How do women students who mentor believe that they have or have not benefited from the mentoring experience?

To explore the essence of the lived experience of the women mentors, I completed multiple reviews of the transcripts, each view followed by reflection, and a reduction process. Triangulation of the data, of the emergent themes, was provided via two interviews with the mentoring program coordinator. The six themes that emerged from the interviews were: 1) reflecting on past experience; 2) wanting to help; 3) setting boundaries; 4) experiencing strong emotions; 5) relational support from other women; and 6) mentoring as a reciprocal relationship.

Delimitations of the Study

The criteria for selection of the potential mentors included demonstrated academic success; proven ability to balance home, work, and coursework; and students that were pursuing training in the helping professions such as nursing, counseling, and social services. Potential mentors were required to complete a two-
day training to be qualified to serve as mentors for the Returning Women’s Program. Six of the nine qualified mentors volunteered to participate in this research study. The six participants represent diverse backgrounds. The age of the participants ranges from 29 to 51 and include four women who are Caucasian and two who are of African American heritage. All of the women have children. Four of the participants are first generation college students.

Limitations of the Study

1. The size of the study population was limited by the number of mentors that met all the criteria for serving as mentors in the college’s mentoring program for returning women (nine) and the number of individuals who volunteered for this study (six).

2. There were a limited number of mentees to be paired with the mentors and there was no way to predict what number of mentees would honor their commitment to participate in the mentoring program.

3. The mentoring program was in its first year of operation and this factor could have impacted the number of mentors and mentees who participated in the program and the number that continued with their commitment.

4. The maximum period of time available to the mentor-mentee pairs in this study was 7.5 months. This was due to the design of the program as an academic year mentoring experience and the initial matching of the pairs taking place in late October instead of at the beginning of fall term.
5. The mentees were not participants in this study and therefore their impact on the experience was only addressed as it was reported by the student mentors.

**Definition of Terms**

*Mentoring:* For the purposes of this study, mentoring is defined as a formal, one-to-one relationship between two individuals, with the mentor being the person who has more experience as a college student.

*Mentor* - The women student volunteer who is a graduate of the Returning Women's Program and has met all the requirements of that program to serve as a mentor. *Mentee* - The student being mentored is called a mentee except when quoting an author who uses the term protégé or advisee.

*Returning Women's Program* - The pseudonym for the entry program offered by the Women's Resource Center at the community college for displaced homemakers, low-income and non-traditional students including first generation college students.

**Summary**

My goal in conducting this qualitative research study was to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of being a woman student mentor. This study was designed to add to the literature on mentoring and in particular the literature that documents the experience of mentors. The study will also contribute
information on the experience of student mentors and the experience of women mentors.

The results and recommendations from this study are of benefit to student service professionals and community college administrators who are developing or managing mentoring programs on college campuses.
CHAPTER 2

ORIGINS OF THE TERM MENTOR

When studying mentoring it is important to understand the origins of the word mentor and the context in which the concept of mentoring developed. The historical foundation for the meaning of mentoring is well depicted in Homer’s Odyssey. Guide, trusted friend, and advisor are terms that are often used as descriptors for the word mentor. In The Odyssey, Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, through the form of Mentor, Mentes, and other personae, serves as an advisor and guide to Odysseus’ son, Telemakhos. She serves, in fact, as the first mentor providing guidance to Telemakhos throughout this epic tale.

The original Mentor appears in The Odyssey as an old and trusted friend of Odysseus (Daloz, 1999). Mentor is charged by Odysseus (Roman name of Ulysses) to care for his young son, Telemakhos in Homer’s epic, The Odyssey. Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, assumes the form of Mentor when she wishes to guide and advise Telemakhos during his search for his father (Corbett, 1995).

Many authors blend the identity and actions of the characters Mentes and Mentor into one. And yet Mentes is introduced first in the tale, in Book I, as the son of the veteran Ankhialos, who is a stranger to Telemakhos. Mentes, a sea captain, states “years back, my family and yours were friends.” Mentor enters the tale in Book II, “a comrade in arms of the prince Odysseus, an old man now” who was left in charge of his house. Athena assumes the guises of Mentes and Mentor...
when she guides and advises Telemakhos. What is important is that the essences of both experiences, those discussions between Telemakhos and Mentes and with Mentor, have traveled down to our current day language as meaning *mentor* - a guide, a trusted friend.

This epic tale provides us with an ancient look at the role of a mentor and at women as agents of transformation through providing guidance in the development of character and self-esteem.

The following are excerpts from *The Odyssey*, accompanied by my interpretation of the relationship between the prose and the concepts embedded in the practice of mentoring. For ease and enjoyment of reading, I have used the Robert Fitzgerald translation and its spellings; other translations may use different spellings. The goddess Athena, disguised as Mentes, a Taphian captain, appears to Telemakhos early in *The Odyssey*. In the following passage, she is speaking with her father Zeus (Book I, Lines 113–116):

The grey-eyed goddess Athena answered him:

> For my part, I shall visit Ithaka
> to put more courage in the son, and rouse him
> to call an assembly of the islanders,
> Akhaian gentlemen with flowing hair.

“To put more courage” and to “rouse him” both speak to the support one receives from a mentor to move forward to a desired outcome.
And in Book I, Lines 129–133, she descends to Ithaka disguised as Mentes.

Flashing down from Olympos’ height she went to stand in Ithaka, before the Manor, just at the doorsill of the court. She seemed a family friend, the Taphian captain, Mentes, waiting, with a light hand on her spear.

“Flashing down” from the height suggests a mentor coming to the aid of the mentee, arriving at a critical time during his life journey. “Just at the doorsill” describes a mentor standing at the beginning of the journey that she will take with the mentee. “A light hand” bespeaks a gentle holding of the experience about to unfold.

After receiving counsel from Athena regarding how to deal with his mother’s suitors, Athena (still disguised as Mentes) prepares to leave, to go back to sea (Book I, Lines 355–358).

Telemakhos replied:

Friend, you have done me kindness, like a father to his son, and I shall not forget your counsel ever.

“Done me kindness, like a father” speaks to the interpersonal relationship of the mentor/mentee experience – the trusted guide. “And I shall not forget” suggests how the transformational journey, so eloquently described by Daloz (1999), leaves its lasting effect on the mentee.
Yet, the story indicates that Telemakhos did indeed understand that he had been visited not by Mentes, but by a god (Book I, Lines 368–374).

> With this Athena left him
> as a bird rustles upward, off and gone.
> But as she went she put new spirit in him,
> a new dream of his father, clearer now,
> so that he marveled to himself
> divining that a god had been his guest.
> Then godlike in his turn he joined the suitors.

The phrases “rustles upward,” “put new spirit in him,” and “a new dream” bring to mind images of uplifting, as the mentoring experience is uplifting.

> “Godlike in his turn” communicates an expression of conducting oneself in reflection of another, in this case Athena, as we do when we conduct ourselves in reflection of a mentor.

And later in Book I, Telemakhos’ knowledge that it is not Mentes who has visited him is stated again (Lines 469–473).

> My guest, however, was a family friend,
> Mentes, son of Ankhialos.
> He who rules the Taphian people of the sea.

> So said Telemakhos, though in his heart
> He knew his visitor had been immortal.

Book I (Lines 499–500), ends with these words:

> And all night long, wrapped in the finest fleece,
> He took in thought the course Athena gave him

The lessons and words of the mentor are internalized. “Took in thought the course” indicates that the life path is forever altered by the guidance provided by the mentor.
In Book II we are introduced to Mentor, Odysseus’ old friend and comrade in arms (Lines 235–238).

The boy sat down in silence. Next to stand was Mentor, comrade in arms of the prince Odysseus, an old man now. Odysseus left him authority over his house and slaves, to guard them well.

Athena then comes to Telemakhos in Mentor’s figure and tone and speaks to him about his father and counsels him regarding ship, crew, and crossing to seek news of his father, providing Telemakhos with much needed guidance for his journey.

Much later in this epic tale, in Book XXII, we encounter Athena again in the guise of Mentor coming to the aid of Odysseus (Lines 227–229).

But now into the gracious doorway stepped Zeus’s daughter Athena. She wore the guise of Mentor, and Odysseus appealed to her in joy:

“Into the gracious doorway stepped” has a similar implication to “just at the doorsill” in Book I. Athena, now in the guise of Mentor, steps into the action at the beginning of this battle, just as mentors often step into our lives at a beginning of an adventure (Lines 230 - 235).

“O Mentor, join me in this fight! Remember how all my life I’ve been devoted to you, friend of my youth!”

For he guessed that it was Athena, Hope of Soldiers.
“Devotion” and “hope” are qualities that the mentor often brings to the relationship called mentoring. Athena joins Odysseus and his son Telemakhos in their fight to win back Ithaka.

Throughout *The Odyssey* Athena guides Telemakhos as he journeys to find his father and bring him home. The themes of trust, guidance, support, and staying on course continue throughout *The Odyssey* and throughout the relationship between Athena and Telemakhos.

In summary, the foundation for mentoring, as it first appears in *The Odyssey* comes from the acts of the goddess Athena disguised in the forms of Mentes and Mentor. Her guidance and advice to the young son of a mortal whom she champions set the stage for mentoring to be viewed as a life-changing experience involving guidance from an experienced and wise person at the outset of an important journey.

A defining quality of myth is that these are stories that illustrate and illumine archetypal, widely shared human experiences—things that happen to people everywhere. This is one way a myth can be differentiated from a mere story. The mythic quality of this story is evidenced by how well it describes the shared human experience of mentoring. It is therefore no wonder that the proper noun *Mentor* has come into standard use to signify the archetypal gift humans give to each other of “mentoring.” Mentoring is a mythic activity. When we mentor each other, we enter the realm of myth and legend.
In closing, I leave my readers with one of my favorite quotes regarding the mentoring experience.

Mentors give us the magic that allows us to enter the darkness: a talisman to protect us from evil spells, a gem of wise advice, a map, and sometimes simply courage. But always the mentor appears near the outset of the journey as a helper, equipping us in some way for what is to come, a midwife to our dreams, a “keeper of the promise” (Parks 1986). Daloz, 1999, p. 18.
CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of women students who serve as mentors to other women on a community college campus. This research study contributes to the literature on women as mentors.

To provide a background for this study, the literature review focuses on two primary areas: The experience of women serving as mentors and mentoring in an educational setting. The literature reviewed on women mentors looks at the historical development of understanding the way in which women make meaning of an experience and the studies that delved into the experience of women mentors. Mentoring in an educational setting addresses elements key to this study: the types of mentoring occurring on college campuses, student-to-student mentoring models, and the use of student-to-student mentoring as a retention tool.

Mentoring has come to mean many things – most frequently, it refers to a person of more experience providing advice and guidance to a person with less experience (Cohen, 1995; Daloz, 1999; Hegstad, 1999; Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Kram, 1983, 1985; Mott 2002; Mullen 1998; Murray, 1991; Rhodes, 2002; Wadsworth, 2002; Zachary, 2000). I have used the term student-to-student mentoring rather than peer mentoring. Though the relationship is a peer
relationship in the sense that both the mentor and person being mentored (the mentee) in this study are students, their experience level is not the same. The student providing the mentoring has more experience in the college environment and with the particular college system and campus where the mentoring takes place.

**Literature Search**

My search for literature and research studies related to mentoring began with a search of the ERIC database followed by a search of the Dissertations International database, journal databases such as Academic Elite and ECHOST, and time spent with reference librarians at several facilities. This was followed by a search on the Internet, which includes volumes of information, but relatively few articles and publications that were useful to my study. I also searched online booksellers for topics on mentoring and ordered books that appeared to hold promise for use in this study. I had personal contact with authors in the field of mentoring: Drs. Laurent Daloz, Jean Rhodes, Susan Weinberger, and Susan Ford Wiltshire. I also had personal contact with staff at the Washington, D.C. office of the American Association of Community Colleges. Finally, I explored the reference section of the books, articles, and journals that I had obtained and ordered some of these referenced materials that appeared to address my topic.

The use of the term mentoring to describe various relationships has grown exponentially over the past decade. It is now common to find the word “mentor” or
“mentoring” in our daily news and conversation. Between the time of my first Google search using the search term “mentor*” in December 2002 and the second search in July 2005, the resulting listings had increased by over 500 percent from 4,070,000 to 22,100,000. The “hits” for the term “mentoring” rose from 2,350,000 in December 2004 to 18,900,000 in July 2005. Similar, while not as dramatic, has been the increase in the number of publications and research studies related to mentoring. Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, the only international journal that addresses mentorship as a significant research area, has expanded the size of the three issues for 2005 and will shift to four annual issues in 2006. What has not expanded rapidly is the research related to mentoring programs on college campuses. The main body of research related to mentoring focuses on mentoring youth and mentoring as part of induction programs in the field of nursing, teaching, and science-related professions such as engineering.

The Experience of Women Mentors

There are two connecting strands of literature that discuss the experience of women and women as mentors. First is the literature on what has been termed “women’s way of knowing” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) and “women’s way of mentoring” (Christenson, 1999; Dahle, 1998; Moss, 2001). This body of literature forms a base for our current thinking about women and how they interact. The second is current studies that look at women mentors and their experience in the mentoring role.
Understanding Women’s Way

The term mentor and the concept of mentoring are interwoven in the discussion and research relating to stages of life and adult development. Levinson (1976) introduced the mentor relationship as “one of the most complex, and developmentally important, a man can have in early adulthood” (p.97). Following Levinson’s initial article (1974) on stages of life, Gail Sheehy, popularized the concept and term mentor in her book Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life (Daloz, 1998).

Beginning with the studies conducted by Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Erikson, and later Levinson a body of research began to develop on life cycles and stages of development (Sheehy, 1976). Building on the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung the studies on life cycles created a deeper and more complex view of adulthood (Levinson, 1976). As stated by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986), William Perry, in his influential book Forms of Intellectual and Ethical development in the College Years (1970), describes how students’ conceptions of the nature and origins of knowledge evolve and how their understanding of themselves as knowers changes over time. It is important to note that only men were interviewed in the original studies conducted by Erikson, Levinson, and Perry, but other researchers conducted studies that included women or that were focused exclusively on women, including studies on women’s developmental stages, and how women define themselves (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976).
In 1982 Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking work, *In a Different Voice* brought to the forefront what she termed "recurrent problems in interpreting women's development" and a "disparity between women's experience and the representation of human development." The central assumptions of her research were:

- That the way people talk about their lives is significant
- That the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule's study of 135 women, inspired and informed by the works Carol Gilligan and William Perry, focuses on "what else women might have to say about the development of their minds and on alternative routes that are sketchy or missing in Perry's version" (page 9). They interviewed women to understand their experience and problems as learners and knowers. Their resulting book, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind*, they discuss the experience of silencings and disempowerment, the lack of voice, the importance of personal experience in knowing, connected strategies in knowing, and resistance to disimpassioned knowing.

**Women and Mentoring**

Wiltshire (1998, preface) describes mentors as "those companions for the journey who give us the courage to be who are." In her article, "Women's Way of Mentoring", about the experience of women as mentors and mentees in corporate America, Dahle (1998) states that "Women's mentoring is also more about commitment than about chemistry. It's about personal growth and development
rather than about promotions and plums. And it’s more about learning than power” (p.192).

Several studies document stories of women’s experiences in mentoring other women and the impact that experience has had on their life view and future goals (Bean, Readence, Barone, & Sylvester, 2004; Christenson, 1999; Colley, 2002; Ervin, 1995; Grisham, Ferguson, & Brink, 2004; Moss, 2001). Bean, Readence, Barone, & Sylvester and Colley present contrasting view on mentoring as a model for personal development. Christenson, Grisham, Ferguson, & Brink, and Moss discuss the way in which women mentor each other and the reciprocity of the relationship. Ervin explores the challenges women have faced in mentoring relationships.

Moss (2001), How Women Mentor: A Phenomenological Study of Five Women Who Live the Tradition of the Ancient Greek Goddess Athene, focuses specifically on women as mentors. Her research was conducted via interviews with five women professionals to determine the lived experience of women mentors. These were professional women who served as mentors to others.

As mentors these women provide career guidance. This is a function that is assumed to be basic to the mentor’s job description; these women sometimes take this a step further, guiding the mentee in discovering and developing her own inner values and goals (p. 161).
In addressing the role of relationship development in mentoring, she explores psychoanalytic theory, Jungian theory, self-psychology theory, and feminist theory. Seven themes emerged from her research:

1. Relationship is central to the mentoring process.
2. The primary function of a mentor is to provide support to the mentee.
3. Most of the essential characteristics of mentoring are similar to the essential characteristics of parenting.
4. At its core there is a spiritual quality to mentoring.
5. There exists a shadow side to mentoring (Shadow side: being the Jungian term describing aspects of the individual that are incompatible with the self-concept or personality and are therefore banished to the unconscious).
6. The mentor, as well as the mentee, benefits from the mentoring relationship.
7. Certain salient characteristics are shared by the women in this study.

Christenson (1999), in *Women's Way of Mentoring* included survey data from 23 professional men and women. She interviewed ten women regarding their experience as a recipient of mentoring from other women in their place of employment. Although this study focused primarily on the mentee and not the
mentor it is included here as it provides a look at themes that come from the mentoring experience and speaks to the traits of a successful mentor.

The themes identified that were common to the women interviewed were stated in her research as:

- Cared that I succeeded, cared about me
- Believed in me, knew I could succeed
- Provided encouragement/confidence
- Taught me things, gave good advice
- Led by example
- Informal, woman-to-woman mentorship

Her findings were two-fold: She found that “One of the most common ways of women mentoring women was one-on-one. It was situational, the mentoring happened as the need arose.” The second part of her findings was that, “several interviewees used women’s groups as both networks and mentors.” She continues her analysis by capturing the essence of what women look for in a mentor, how they build the relationship, and why it is important.

Women look for those who have the expertise, the values, and the roles that they need for the situation at hand. Because they are relationship based, women build the relationships as they grow. They cultivate trusting, caring, and believing in themselves and in others because they know how important these characteristics are to success in any of its forms. (p. 40)

Ervin (1995) conducted interviews with six woman teachers about their mentoring experiences. Two of the women viewed themselves as mentors and
mentees. Four stories, from four of the six individuals interviewed, are presented in her article, “Power, Frustration, and “Fierce Negotiation” in Mentoring Relationships: Four Women Tell Their Stories.” One woman mentor, Roberta, describes her initial image of a mentor as “someone old, with vast realms of experience and wisdom” (p. 458). Viewing the mentor role through her own experience she sees the role as “facilitating mentees in finding their own answers to whatever questions they have, as well as their own processes in reaching those answers - regardless of whether those answers and processes match hers.” Roberta also describes how the experience of mentoring has “helped her to define boundaries between her personal and professional life.”

Colley (2002) argues in her article that mentoring is not clearly conceptualized and that the concept of mentoring remains elusive. In her historical review, she takes issue with the accounts that focus on the figure Mentor as a wise and kindly elder, stating that myths are commonly used to legitimize and secure consensus for dominant discourses, to obscure and simultaneously reinforce unequal social relations in our patriarchal, Eurocentric, capitalist society. Colley states that as a “Marxist feminist,” she rejects any unitary notion of “women’s ways of knowing and doing,” and argues that class, race, and gender all shape the social world in complex, interdependent ways.

Grisham, Ferguson, & Brink (2004) present their information on mentoring via case studies of three women teacher candidates. The researchers conclude that flexibility and openness to learning on the part of the mentor teachers are
conditions that provide optimal support to teacher candidates and increase the opportunities for learning to occur for both the mentor and the mentee. Mentor teachers reported in interviews that they were committed to hosting student teachers for a variety of reasons: the mentors gain opportunities to reflect and share, are exposed to new ideas, and appreciate the sense of teamwork.

In an interpretive study by Bean, Readence, Barone & Sylvester (2004), the mentoring process and roles of the mentor and mentee are explored for one mentor and her advisee. In describing her mentoring experience, the mentor referred to as Kathy, notes “for me, it’s turning things back to them and nudging them in the margins with go check this out... go look back at the site.. talk to the other doctoral students...” The researchers view Kathy’s style of mentoring in parallel with feminist practices where levels of concern are included naturally within the mentoring relationship. It was also noted that both the advisee and the mentor saw reciprocity in the relationship.

This section has presented several views of the experience of women as mentors. The mentors in these studies cited the following as part of their experiences: cultivating trust and caring, facilitating the mentee to find her own answers, allowing the mentee to use her own process, defining personal and professional boundaries, opportunities for learning for both the mentor and mentee, opportunities to reflect and share, exposure to new ideas, and reciprocity in the relationship.
Mentoring in an Educational Setting

Mentoring programs are now in place in educational settings from grade school through graduate school and beyond. The type of mentoring models involving college students fall primarily into three categories: college students mentoring students in secondary and elementary schools, college faculty and staff mentoring students, and experienced college students mentoring new students. Additionally, there is a growing use of mentors in the fields of nursing, health education, and teaching where mentoring is utilized as part of the induction program (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995; Hawkey, 1997; Krull, 2005; Ogletree, Brey, & Hardman, 1998; Schoessler, 1996). Literature regarding the impact on the lives of mentors who share their time and knowledge is lacking. According to Moss (2001), the limited existing studies have focused on the experience of faculty or professionals who are mentoring students, not on students who are serving as mentors.

Mentoring programs for college students have increased in popularity, as evidenced by the expanding amount of student mentor handbooks and literature on this subject. Programs for mentoring in science, nursing, education, and other career areas have access to additional resource support from such groups as regional educational laboratories, universities, MentorNet (e-mentoring for women students of science and engineering by women in the industry), and the National Education Association (NEA) Foundation for the Improvement of Education.
Student retention is one of the key areas where mentoring literature is found related to four- and two-year colleges. The practice of mentoring to enhance student retention has a longer history in minority student retention programs than in general student population retention (Clements, 2000; Kennedy, 2000; Szelenyi, 2001). The main focus of this section of the literature review is on mentoring programs that are designed to serve college students. (The term college is used to indicate two-and four-year institutions including universities.)

**College Students Mentoring Youth**

Mentoring programs for students in high school, middle school, and elementary school have grown dramatically over the past ten years. Big Brothers Big Sisters, one of the oldest youth mentoring organizations, currently includes approximately 500 agencies serving more than 5,000 communities across the country (Big Brothers Big Sisters, Annual Report 2004). As the federal, state and local governments have become more involved in funding mentoring programs this movement has spread at a rapid rate. Currently the federal government through several agencies—U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Health and Human Services, Department of Education—provides funding for community-based, school-based, and faith-based mentoring serving at-risk youth and children of incarcerated parents. Additional federal funding for traditional programs such as BBBS has also expanded (National Mentoring Center, personal communication, June 2005).
College students are being increasingly drawn on as a source of mentors for elementary and secondary schools. For example, the federal Office of Minority Health funds Family & Community Violence Prevention Programs that utilize college students as mentors in local Family Life Centers. The college student volunteers provide after-school tutoring and mentoring for younger youth. The federal Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP), now in over twenty states, also recruits college students to work with high school and middle school students. In California, community college students who are also part-time AmeriCorps members, mentor youth who live in foster care. Large youth organizations such as BBBS and local organizations alike are recruiting college students to serve as mentors for their school-based programs serving elementary through high school-aged youth.

Already busy with college life and the pressure of academic achievement, college students take on additional responsibilities including a substantial time commitment when they agree to mentor youth in the neighboring communities. They often provide this service on a volunteer basis without financial or academic incentives. Goodland (1995) cautions that:

Reciprocity is needed to avoid the exploitation of students. That is to say, students must have something to gain from the experience; they are not there as cheap substitutes for professionals, rather as people doing work that extends and deepens the range of services that professionals already provide. (p. 5)

As community-based, school-based, and faith-based programs serving youth in elementary through secondary school increase, college students are being
heavily recruited to serve as mentors for these programs. While a few of the programs provided the students with stipends or educational awards as in the case of AmeriCorps based programs, most programs do not provide any financial assistance to the students. College students may receive benefit from volunteer service as a mentor via participation in mentor training and application of learned skills in the social and youth service fields.

**College Faculty and Staff Mentoring Students**

Mentoring relationships develop between students and teachers in formal adult education settings ranging from adult basic education to advanced professional training (Merriam, 1983). Mentoring students is seen as an important role for college faculty. Malm (1999) takes the position that faculty members should be expected “to serve as mentors and should be available to go the extra step for a student that needs help.” Galbraith and Cohen (1995) in their introduction to *Mentoring: New Strategies and Challenges* state that “Faculty and staff mentors with ‘school-smart’ knowledge and strategies serve as valuable resources for adult learners with few or no peer reference points to help them maneuver through and succeed in the college environment.”

Academic mentoring models that are typically found in the literature focus on the experience of four- and two-year college faculty members or other staff serving as mentors to students (Hawkey, 1997; Kennedy, 2000; Ogletree, Brey, & Hardman, 1998).
In a study of faculty perceptions and practices of mentoring in the faculty-teaching assistant relationship, Calkins & Kelley (2005) surveyed 232 full-time faculty members. Seventy-five faculty members from 22 different departments responded to their survey. The study revealed that many wanted to provide their teaching assistant (TA) with a better relationship than they had experienced. Also it was noted that the mentoring described and provided by the faculty mentors was not congruent with best practices of effective mentoring. Mentoring was provided in a mainly traditional, “downward transmission of ideas from the expert to the novice” and not seen as a reciprocal experience. The researcher review of faculty and teaching assistant handbooks from research universities across the United States revealed that “few faculty handbooks address how faculty members can mentor or even work effectively with their TAs, whereas TA manuals abound with advice, tips and hints for helping them work with faculty…”

Mentoring as an educational strategy was studied by Gladstone (1987). Her qualitative study was conducted via in-open ended interviews, reports, transcripts of mentoring workshops, and responses and comments from more than 300 questionnaires. Her examination of the role of the mentor in society and the motivations for mentors lead her to conclude that “students need instructors with mentor-like characteristics to create a challenging, exciting learning environment.”

Hagedorn, Maxwell, Rodriguez, Hocevar, & Fillpot (2000) studied peer and student-faculty relations in community colleges as well as address gender
differences in student relationships. A sub-theme of the study is the interplay of nature and nurture. The two research questions that were addressed were:

1. Do the peer relationships of community college students differ by gender?

2. Do the faculty-student relationships of community college students differ by gender?

Strong evidence was provided that research related to peer relationships is lacking and that the research that has been conducted in this area addressed the four-year college environment and not the community college experience. Research in the area of student-faculty relationships was more abundant although it was rare to find a study that focused on the community college experience.

The setting for their study was a medium-sized community college located in a middle-class predominantly blue-collar, suburban community on the West Coast. A classroom survey was administered to students enrolled in a variety of general education courses. A second survey, with a sample size of 774, was administered later in the same semester. After eliminating participants for whom data were missing, a sample of 179 male and 269 female students was selected.

They conducted a two-phase analysis, with the first phase being the identification of significant factors on which male and female participants differed. The second phase looked at where or how males and females differ most. Phase one indicated statistically significant gender difference in social relations. Other findings included female students more frequently discussed career matters with
faculty and reported having less difficulty meeting and making friends than male
students.

Students need a formalized way to connect with faculty and peers to obtain
academic and personal support to assist them in transitioning into college life. The
need for support including mentoring for new students is well articulated by
Vincent Tinto (2002):

Most students, especially those in their first year of college require
some form of support. Some may require academic assistance, while
others may need social or personal support. For others it may mean
finding a “safe haven” in a sea of unfamiliar peers. Support may be
provided in structured forms such as in summer bridge programs,
mentor programs, and student clubs or it may arise in the everyday
workings of the institution such as in student contact with faculty
and staff advisors.

**Student-to-Student Mentoring in Colleges**

Student-to-student mentoring and tutoring programs are also expanding at a
rapid rate in part due to the view that these programs will lead to student retention
and increased academic performance on the part of the student who is mentored.

According to Dr. Susan Weinberger, a national expert on the subject of
mentoring, “the development and implementation of peer mentor programs on
college campuses continue to increase at a dramatic rate” (personal communication,
July 25, 2005).

McLean (2004), in a study of peer mentoring at the Nelson R. Mandela
School of Medicine designed to integrate new students in the academic and social
culture of the institution, looked at the experience of senior students mentoring less
experienced (junior) students in light of a shift in curriculum. The top five rewarding experiences for mentors included: Knowing that you have been able to help; knowing that your mentees are doing well academically; developing friendships/bonds; becoming more responsible; and growing personally. Difficulties experienced by the mentors included mentees not attending meetings; timetable clashes; getting students to open up; reaching out to the mature student; crossing cultural barriers; understanding what mentees expect; knowing what to cover in the meetings; and gaining respect of the mentees.

Researchers in the area of peer mentoring are recommending formal mentoring programs to address a variety of needs in four- and two- year colleges. Areas where mentoring have been proposed include helping with the transition into college during the freshman year (Tinto, 2002), programs for reentry women students (Bloom, 1995), retention of minority students (James, 1991; Pope, 2002; Stromei, 2000), and programs for students transitioning from two year colleges into four-year universities (Flaga, 2002).

In her study on transition for community college students to four-year institutions, Flaga (2002), proposes peer mentoring as one of the means to lessen the “transfer shock.” She recommends:

A formal peer mentor program may facilitate the use of informal learning resources, as well as assist with connecting to peers. This allows transfer students to connect and feel a part of the four-year university by getting to know fellow students who have prior experience with the university’s academic, social, and physical environments. (p. 133)
Bloom (1995) stressed the importance of mentors in an educational setting who provide support structures for reentry women whose personal or family support may be threatened by their return to formal education.

As peer mentoring (student-to-student programs) continue to expand in number and type of students receiving services on college campuses it is important to take into account the findings of these studies when designing and implementing new programs.

**College Student Retention**

One of the challenges faced by community college leaders is the retention of students, especially underrepresented and non-traditional students. Student withdrawal from colleges in the United States has long been recognized as a significant social, economic, and educational problem (Umoh, Eddy, & Spaulding, 1994).

The successful integration of students into the college environment is a crucial element of raising retention rates (Clements, 2000). Some common efforts at community colleges to achieve such integration are freshman seminars, mentoring programs, and strategies developed to create a supportive campus climate (Szelenyi, 2001). Preliminary findings suggest that there is a positive association between participation in a mentoring program and the persistence rates of minority and low-income students (Stromei, 2000; Tinto, 2002).

Formal mentoring programs have provided the most significant increase in enrollment and retention of minority students and increased their overall
satisfaction with their educational experience (James, 1991). Stromei (2000) points to the Arranged Mentor for Instructional Guidance and Organizational Support (AMIGOSTM) program which has been successful in matching mentors and protégés based on personality types. The Puente Project in California and the Washington Achiever’s Program in the state of Washington have also proven effective in strengthening retention through a combination of peer mentoring and financial support.

Pope (2002) conducted a study that analyzed the perception of minority students regarding the mentoring process of their community college. With 250 students responding, over 45 percent stated that “there are peer mentors who can advise me” and less than 10 percent had stated faculty serve as mentors for all students. Over 22 percent of the respondents stated that they serve as mentors for other students.

Kennedy (2000) studied the potential of student success via involvement in a peer mentoring program at a community college. She researched the impact of a peer mentor program on mentor and protégé participants. The results of her study indicate that there was a positive impact to the protégé’s commitment to the academic success and that the program provided them with emotional support. The mentors participating in the study gained satisfaction from helping others; the chance to refresh previously learned material; and the opportunity to practice skills that could be transferred to the workplace.
The number of studies related to peer mentoring in a college environment has increased during the past five years, providing information on the impact of the mentoring experience on the mentee and on the mentor. The variety in the populations served by the programs is wide. The findings of the studies generally conclude that peer mentor programs are valuable in increasing student retention and student satisfaction.

**Summary**

While mentoring programs across educational setting have continued to increase over the past decade, the body of research on mentoring in a college setting is limited. The majority of the related literature regarding college mentoring programs has been primarily in the areas of minority student retention and faculty to student mentoring (James, 1991; Galbraith & Cohen, 1995; Hagedorn, et al; Malm, 1999; Pope, 2002; Stromei, 2000). Although program guides and handbooks for college student mentor program are now quite common, there is no evidence from the literature that the materials are based on research of best practices particular to college students. Additional studies need to be undertaken to determine the design of student-to-student mentoring programs and the type of training that should be provided to the students that serve as mentors.

A body of literature is beginning to emerge related to the experience of the mentor in a college setting (Bressler, 2005; Calkins & Kelley, 2005; Kennedy, 2000; Krull, 2005; Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2002). This literature, along
with the literature on women as mentors (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Christenson, 1999; Dahle, 1998; Moss, 2001; Wiltshire, 1998) can provide insights into the development of quality mentoring programs for women students.

The studies reviewed in this chapter indicate that students who receive mentoring services benefited from career guidance (Moss, 2001), increased commitment to academic success and received emotional support (Kennedy, 2000); sense of security in helping them develop flexibility and an awareness of and identification with the institution (Gladstone, 1987), and had increased retention rates (Stromaei, 2000).

The experience of serving as a mentor was cited in several of the studies described in this chapter: Mentors were exposed to new ideas, gained opportunities to share (Grisham, Ferguson, & Brink, 2004); learned to define boundaries (Ervin, 1995); found rewards in being able to help another student, grew personally, and become more responsible (McLean, 2004); and gained satisfaction from helping others and had the opportunity to practice skills (Kennedy, 2000)
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of women mentors who are community college students. The approach used in this study is psychological phenomenology. The phenomenological method studies the essences of a human experience. Use of this approach fits well with my training in psychology, experience as a counselor, skills as an interviewer, and personal viewpoint on portraying life experiences.

The information shared by the women mentors who participated in this study provides the data to explore the meaning of their experience. Theme analysis of the data provides us with a deeper look at their experience and answers the research question of this study: “What is the lived experience of women students who serve as mentors to other women students?”

The scope of this study is limited to the experience of six women mentors for a returning women’s program at one community college campus. The data were gathered primarily through in-depth interviews with the women mentors; the data were triangulated through interviews with the mentoring program coordinator.

This chapter reviews the tenets of qualitative research and provides an overview of the phenomenological approach. A personal disclosure statement, as is traditional in phenomenological studies, provides information on the researcher’s frame of reference and assists the researcher in bracketing her experience. This is
followed by a description of the research design and study site, selection of the study participants, the data collection process, how ethical considerations were addressed, and the strategies for ensuring soundness of the data collected.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is both exploratory and descriptive. It focuses on the participants’ own frames of reference and perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) and derives its findings from this source (Moss, 2001). Creswell (1998), when discussing qualitative inquiry and research design, states:

> Knowledge is within the meanings people make of it; knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; knowledge is laced with personal biases and values; knowledge is written in a personal, up-close way; and knowledge evolves, emerges, and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied. (p. 19)

Borg, Gall, and Gall (1993) state that the purpose of qualitative research is to understand individuals in their natural state. Creswell (2002) describes the characteristics of qualitative research as:

> an exploration and understanding of a central phenomenon; the literature review holds a minor role and provides justification for the research problem; the study seeks to understand the participant’s experience; data collection includes collection of text or image data; a small number of individuals or sites are studied; data analysis consists of text analysis, thematic development, and interpretation situates the finding within the larger, more abstract meaning; and the researcher takes a reflexive and biased approach. (p. 51)

In qualitative studies, the researcher speaks from his or her own point of reference, his or her own particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic
community perspectives. They enter, view, and write the research through the lens of their own experience (Wolcott, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

The Phenomenology Approach

Phenomenological studies aim to seek an understanding of the essences of an experience, gain understanding on a deeper level, and have the information presented by the individuals who live the experience. Van Manen (1990) states that “Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 9).

Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition begun by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) in the first half of the 20th century. The German philosopher Heidegger, the French existentialist Sartre, and the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty all were important figures in the philosophical discussions that followed from it. Smith (1989) comments that “the methods and characterization of the discipline were widely debated by Husserl and his successors, and these debates continue to the present day.” Edmund Husserl’s Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (1931) defines phenomenology as a descriptive analysis of the essence of pure consciousness.
The aim of phenomenology and what it seeks to understand is described by Wilson (2002) in the following quote:

The aim of phenomenology, as propounded by Husserl, is to study human phenomena without considering questions of their causes, their objective reality, or even their appearances. The aim is to study how human phenomena are experienced in consciousness, in cognitive and perceptual acts, as well as how they may be valued or appreciated aesthetically. Phenomenology seeks to understand how persons construct meaning and a key concept is intersubjectivity. Our experience of the world, upon which our thoughts about the world with and through others. Whatever meaning we create has its roots in human actions, and the totality of social artefacts and cultural objects is grounded in human activity. (p. 2)


Polkinghorne (1989) provides this description of phenomenological psychology:

Phenomenological psychology is a perspective that acknowledges the reality of the realm of meaningful experience as the fundamental locus of knowledge. It differs from mainstream psychology by holding that human behavior is an expression of meaningful experience rather than a mechanically learned response to stimuli.

The processes employed in the phenomenological model are, as described by Moustakas, 1994: 1) epoche; 2) phenomenological reduction, including bracketing and horizontalization, identifying invariant quality and themes, individual textual descriptions, and composite textural description; 3) imaginative
variation; and 4) creative synthesis (p.180–181). These important process-terms along with the concept of intentionality of consciousness are further described below:

*Epoche*

Epoche, according to Moustakas, is a suspension of belief, the ability to take a fresh look at the phenomenon under study. The researcher looks inside herself to identify personal bias and eliminate personal involvement (Patton, 1990). This is followed by a period of incubation and then the researcher re-evaluates the topic, reorganizing her thinking and exploring any new meaning.

*Phenomenological reduction*

Phenomenological reduction is a systematic, rigorous way of exploring the data to uncover essences. Rhodes (1987) states that reduction is a method of sifting through the data for expressions relevant to the study which contain an implicit or explicit sense of or moment of the experience—a moment which can be abstracted and labeled. Moustakas (1994) includes bracketing the topic or question, horizontilization, delimited horizons or meanings, invariant qualities and themes, individual textual descriptions, and composite textual descriptions all as a part of phenomenological reduction.

*Horizontalization*

Stratman (1990), who studied under Moustakas, states that the first step in the reduction is called horizontalization (p. 79). The research assumes that each experience has multiple horizons or meaning. The researcher reads each interview
transcript and gives equal value to each statement. Statements are then put into groups or clusters of commonality. All redundant or irrelevant statements are eliminated. The remaining statements are considered significant components of the experience and are grouped and labeled as the emergent themes of the experiences, the essential constituents that make the experience what it is.

**Bracketing**

Van Manen (1990) offers this definition, “Bracketing describes the act of suspending one’s various beliefs in the reality of the nature world. The term “bracketing” was borrowed from mathematics by Husserl (1911–80), the father of phenomenology, who himself was a mathematician” (p. 176). Bracketing requires the researcher to set aside all preconceptions or prejudgments of the phenomenon being studied.

**Imaginative variation**

Imagining the appearance of the phenomenon against a backdrop of various horizons, the researcher attempts to see what the total phenomenon means. It is a systematic and critical reflection of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) describes these reflections as the researcher asking, “Could it be this? Could it be that? In relation to other things they have disclosed, what could it mean?” The phenomenon is imaginatively viewed from all angles, considered from all possible points of view, to arrive at the essences of the experience.
Creative synthesis

In this stage the researcher intuitively and reflectively integrates the composite textural and composite structural descriptions of the experiences and develops a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience.

Intentionality of consciousness

This concept was initially put forth by Husserl, and essentially means the reality of an object relates to our consciousness of the object (Creswell, 1998). Every experiencing has its reference or direction toward what is experienced and, contrarily, every experienced phenomenon refers to or reflects a mode of experiencing to which it is present (Ihde 1986, p.42–43).

Essential invariant structure or essence

All experience has an underlying structure and the reader of the research should come away with a better understanding of what the essence of the experience was like for the study participants (Creswell, 1998).
Table 1: Phenomenological approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology: To gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of lived experience. (cf. Husserl, Polkinghorne, Moustakas, Smith, and Van Manen) My approach has been influenced by transactional psychology, feminism, post-modernism, &amp; dialogue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deepen understanding of the phenomenon of mentoring—the essences of the experience for the mentor. Provide knowledge to inform community college leaders who are implementing student to student mentoring as a vehicle for retention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One can identify the essence of an experience. Mentors have a shared experience. The researcher can bracket her beliefs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epoche: Suspension of belief, the ability to take a fresh look at the phenomena. Bracketing: Listening without interference from preconceived notions. Reduction: A method to reduce the transcribed experience to its essence. Imaginative variation: The phenomena is viewed from all angles and considered from all possible points of view. Intentionality: Every experiencing has its reference or direction towards what is experienced.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To immerse herself in the experience and the data. Steps into the experience freshly without preconceived notions of the meaning of the experience. Seeks shared understanding of the experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidentially, safety &amp; autonomy for research participants. Voluntary participation by the study participants. Study contributes to a field of knowledge. Research is authentic and truthful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual interviews Member checking of transcripts Observations and field notes Personal reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of data followed by periods of reflection Generation of themes Development of recommendation to benefit the field.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Soundness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity, credibility, integrity, respectful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of phenomenological approach

According to Polkinghorne (1989), methods based on phenomenological principles function as general guidelines or outlines, and researchers are expected to develop plans of study especially suited to understanding the particular experiential phenomenon that is the object of their study.

The strengths of phenomenology research are that individuals tell of their own experience and that their words are exactly transcribed. The experiences, often captured in interview form, provide in-depth descriptions of their experiences. This tradition provides an opportunity to share the stories of individuals who often would not have the opportunity to have their voices heard. As described by Polkinghorne (1989), this method also allows the researcher to draw from a variety of sources within his or her tradition, ranging from philosophical texts and research articles to creative literature (such as poetry, plays, and novels), and nonliterary art forms.

The limitation of this approach is that it is expensive and time consuming to conduct phenomenological research due to the long interviews and preparing transcripts of the interviews for analysis. Due to cost and time the number of participants is often limited. It also requires access to individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. It requires the researcher to have a solid grounding in the philosophical precepts of phenomenology (Creswell, 1998) and experience in one-to-one in-depth interviewing. Additionally, the researcher needs to bracket her experience and decide in what way her personal experiences
will be introduced into the study (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Pokinghorne, 1989; Seidman 1998; Van Manen 1990).

In summary, the use of a phenomenological approach for this research study is to gain a better understanding of the lived experience of women student mentors. The intent of this qualitative inquiry is to explore, document, and to communicate the meaning of that experience.

**Personal Disclosure Statement**

One of the ways that researchers who use the phenomenological approach attempt to bracket their prior personal experience is by writing a personal disclosure statement and then reflecting on the significance of the topic studied in relation to their own life. By doing this, they can consciously think through the impact of their experience on the study and then set it to the side. My statement is offered below. I have written this statement, reflected, added to it, and redrafted it several times. Doing so has helped me understand how the beliefs I hold might influence the research activities and my analysis of the data. This allows me, as far as is humanly possible, to “bracket” my experience. Recording my relevant life experiences and the process of writing and thinking have also helped me to acknowledge what meaning that experience has for me in relation to this study. In the design phase of the study, I was conscious of the concept of epoche, and desired as stated by Rhodes (1987), “to go into the phenomenon freshly, naively; standing aside, letting the phenomenon shine through or reveal itself.” (p.50)
My Personal Disclosure

Mentoring and support from other women has had a profound effect on my personal and professional development. Thus, it is a natural research topic for me. I find it personally meaningful to contribute to the body of knowledge on this important topic.

Like the women in this study, I am a non-traditional student. It had been over 20 years from the time I received my master's degree to when I was accepted into this doctoral program. Additionally, as a woman and a parent, I share many other characteristics with the women student mentors who participated in this study. Although my life is currently very stable and comfortable, it was not always that way. School was my intellectual and emotional outlet, my safe harbor, and my place to shine. Higher education afforded me the opportunity to explore, to grow, to develop a professional path. As a teenager in the 1960s, I knew that I wanted to attend college, enter a profession, and be able to independently support myself: I wanted to be a "career woman." This was somewhat of a break from the traditions of the day and from the expectation for women in my rural community. I found navigating the college system confusing and stressful, and the economic reality of what I could afford to pursue as a career versus what I might desire was a shocking dose of reality. Balancing work hours, classes, and study time was a constant challenge.
In the late 1960s and early 1970s advising and counseling services for high school and college students were not nearly as well-developed as they are today. One of my most vivid memories of high school is when the school counselor viewed my aptitude test results and informed me that I would make an excellent housewife. Fortunately, there were peer, faculty, and other adult mentors along the way who helped me sort through college life and career path choices. Without the guidance of one of my college instructors, Jay Summerhays, I would not have returned to college to complete my master’s degree. He saw within me personal strength and a different future for myself, than I could see at the time. And there for me also were my women college friends and later women colleagues who have stood with me on my life’s journey.

During my college years, I became active in various facets of college life. One involvement has had a lasting impact on my relationship with women. In the early 1970s, I joined a group of women who came together to form a Planned Parenthood chapter on our campus. It was controversial and it was a very bonding experience. The college provided us space in an old dormitory that had been converted to offices. We staffed the office, and handed out birth control and safe sex information. But most of all, we talked. We shared our concerns and our experiences of being women. This experience, along with the support from a group of women I met through a brief period of dorm life, brought a new sense of belonging and confidence.
This research also serves to extend my knowledge in an important area of my professional interest and future work. For many years I worked in programs that focused on disability rights, advocacy, and peer services. One of the services offered at Access Oregon, Inc., a center for independent living, where I served as the executive director for seven years, was peer advocacy and support. Today, many similar community-based centers call this service peer mentoring. More recently, I spent four years developing, implementing, and coordinating training events and conferences for the National Mentoring Center (NMC), which focuses on adult-to-youth mentoring. The NMC is based at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) in Portland, Oregon. Currently, I work in the Executive Offices, Human Resource Unit at NWREL coordinating our in-house staff development and employee mentoring program. I have been fortunate that NWREL continues to support my involvement with their clients, as a trainer in the areas of mentoring program design and seminars for mentors. Over the past two years I have increased my involvement with mentor training for college students and employee mentoring programs, and as my involvement increases, my quest for knowledge about peer mentoring at a college and adult level increases.

My educational background is in law enforcement and psychology. The training for my master’s degree included several courses related to interviewing. I have continued to develop my interviewing skills and comfort with virtual strangers via past experience as a counselor, as a radio talk show host, as the coordinator and facilitator of distance learning programs, as an organizational development
consultant, and as a presenter at national and regional conferences. Through this experience I am very aware of the need to separate myself from the interview, to set aside my personal experiences and biases, to let the experience and voice of another take central focus.

I have a growing interest in the area of adult mentoring and mentoring of individuals in transition. As part of my doctoral program requirements at Oregon State University for the Community College Leadership Program, I completed an internship at a women’s resource center that included observing a returning women’s program. I also researched college-level mentoring programs for that center, for my professional involvement in the mentoring field, and for work related to this dissertation.

On a personal level, I have long been fascinated by the stories of ordinary people. A copy of Blue Highways, by William L. Heat-Moon, sits on my night stand, along with Travels with Charley by John Steinbeck. Both are stories of travel, transformation, and meeting everyday people.

**Research Design**

This is a study of the lived experience of women student mentors who mentored other women students; the focus of the research is the experience of the mentor, the essence of her experience. The Returning Women’s Program mentoring effort at the community college is a new program. The program commenced with recruitment and training of mentors in the summer of 2004. The mentors who
participated in this study are from the first set of students who met all of the requirements to begin serving as mentors with this program in the fall of 2004.

There were six women student mentors interviewed as a part of this study. All of the six were assigned a student to mentor (a mentee) during the 2004–2005 academic year. Only three of the mentor-mentee pairs continued meeting from the time they were paired to the end of the academic year. All six of the mentors continued as part of the study even if meetings with the assigned mentee did not continue or take place. The data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews, field notes, and observations. Triangulation of the data was provided via review of the transcripts from the interviews by the study participants and interviews with the mentoring program coordinator. The transcripts were coded by hand using Microsoft Word and Access to sort for words and cluster of words. While qualitative software, such as NVivo and AtlasTi, are available for analysis of qualitative data, I elected to physically immerse myself in the data and use color coding and notes to complete the initial data coding. Additionally, I used the phenomenological process of reduction to assist me in reducing the volume of the transcript data into statements that represented the core of the experience, deleting unrelated and duplicative information.
Research Site

The study site was an urban multi-campus community college on the West Coast. The campus where this study took place is located in an inner-city area. The college’s administrative office and the associate dean of student services for the campus provided approval for this study to be conducted on the campus. The Women’s Resource Center gave me access to students being trained as mentors for their new mentoring program and provided access to the Center’s staff and facilities, including time with the mentoring program coordinator.

The potential mentors were recruited from previous graduates of a returning women’s program that is offered through the Women’s Resource Center at this campus. According to the program’s brochure, the Returning Women’s Program “is a tuition-free program designed to serve as a point of entry” for returning women students. The Returning Women’s Program, is designed for women who are displaced homemakers, low-income, first-generation college students, or a combination of these factors. The program provides an opportunity for women to explore career options and gain self-confidence with a cohort of women in an educational setting. Further, it “provides access to a variety of opportunities which enable participants to acquire the necessary skills to become successfully employed and therefore, economically self sufficient” (program brochure). The returning women’s program is nine weeks in length, held during fall, winter, and spring terms, and students attending the program receive 9 credit hours for attending. The
three major components of the program are personal development, career
development, and college readiness.

I have used a generic description of the community college and the
program, instead of their actual names, to assist in protecting the anonymity of the
women student mentors who participated in this study.

The Mentoring Program

The mentoring program was designed to serve women who are considering
attending the community college and who are participants in the returning women’s
program. Mentors for the program are graduates of the returning women’s program,
most of who are in their second year of classes at the community college.

The potential mentors were personally selected by the mentoring program
coordinator due to their academic success, leadership skills and potential, and their
goal of working in helping professions such as nursing, counseling, and social
services.

Eleven women students were invited to complete the requirements for
serving as a volunteer mentor. One requirement was active participation in a two-
day mentor training seminar held in September 2004. The students attending the
Mentoring Returning Women Students seminar received one credit for the class.
The tuition for the one-credit class was paid for by the Women’s Resource Center.
Childcare services and lunch were also provided for individuals attending the class.
No other financial benefit was provided for serving as a volunteer mentor. Other
benefits of participation, as listed in the recruitment flier for the mentoring program, included: work experience, letter of recommendation, strengths-based supervision, experience of support and learning in a community of other mentors, and ability to contribute to the empowerment of a woman student. Two of the eleven women students invited to participate as mentors had prior commitments for the dates of the required training and, therefore, were unable to participate.

The opportunity to have a mentor was presented to the 20 individuals attending the returning women’s program during fall term 2004. They received an overview of the mentoring program and applications. The women were invited to speak with the mentoring program coordinator if they were interested in pursuing this opportunity. Additionally, seven of the nine trained mentors attended a potluck for the class, held at the end of fall term. This occasion offered the potential mentees the opportunity to meet with the women mentors. A total of four students from fall term 2004 indicated their interest in the program and each was paired with one of the eligible mentors. As there were still mentors available without mentees, it was decided to offer the opportunity to have a mentor to the 19 students who had participated in the winter term 2005 (January - March 2005) returning women’s program. Four of these individuals asked to be paired with a mentor. In all cases, the mentoring program coordinator determined which mentor would be matched with which mentee.
Selection of Study Participants

The nine women students who completed the Women's Resource Center's requirements to serve as mentors for the 2004–2005 academic year were invited to participate in this research study. I presented information regarding this research study and the opportunity to participate (Appendix A: Script for Recruiting Student Mentors) during the last session of the two-day mentor training seminar which took place over two Saturdays during September 2004. I invited all nine of the mentors to consider participating in this study while being clear that I could accept a maximum of six students. Six of the mentors volunteered to be part of the study and all were accepted as participants. No additional contact was made with the three individuals who did not volunteer to participate in this study.

By October 2004, six student mentors had contacted me to begin the process of serving as research participants. They gave me their contact information and we reviewed and signed the informed consent documents, completed demographic information forms, and scheduled the in-depth interviews (Informed Consent Document-Students: Appendix B). Additionally, they selected their pseudonyms, which are Cheryl, Karen, Linda, Mari, Sharon, and Suzanne.

Interviews and Data Collection

I designed the study to include three interviews with each student participant regarding her experience as a woman student mentor. Drawing from the in-depth interview design outlined by Irving Seidman in Interviewing as
Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences (1998), I set the interviews to occur at three stages: the first interview took place before the mentoring match, i.e., before the experience being explored took place; the second interview occurred during the time of the mentoring experience; and the third interview occurred at the end of the academic year and the mentoring experience. The three interviews focused on life history that led up to the decision to serve as a mentor, the details of the experience of serving as a mentor, and reflections on the meaning of the experience. The open-ended questions allowed for exploration of personal meaning and relevance, for individuality of response, and for the opportunity to probe for deeper meaning(s). The list of the framing interview questions is provided in Appendix D.

All interviews were tape recorded with the participants' knowledge and consent. I also recorded field notes before, during, and after the interviews to document location/setting of interviews, body language, and other nonverbal data.

All but one of the interviews took place on the college campus in areas that provided privacy for the interview. The one interview that took place off campus was held at a mentor's home at her request due to her scheduling needs.

The audio tapes were transcribed by a paid transcriptionist. Each student mentor was given a transcribed copy of her interview after each session and asked to identify any changes that should be made to the transcript. The interviews with the student mentors resulted in 315 pages of double-spaced text.
Additionally, I included triangulation of the data analyses and interpretations through interviews with the mentoring program coordinator at the end of the study. Triangulation is a process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research (Creswell, 2002).

I conducted the first set of interviews with the women student mentors in mid to late October 2004, prior to the mentors being paired with their mentees. All six of the women mentors participated in the first interview. The focus of this interview was two-fold. The foremost goal was getting a picture in time of the student, her personal history, and the experiences that led her to the point of making the decision to be a mentor in this program. The second focus of the interview was learning what the student mentor anticipated that the mentoring experience would be like for her. I met with each of the six student mentors. The interviews ranged from 30 to 95 minutes in length.

During November and December 2004 meetings were held with each of the mentor research participants to review their first interview transcripts and to obtain their input on any changes they felt should be made to the transcript. Additionally, a few of the mentors shared with me, at that time, their status of being paired or not paired with a mentee.

I communicated with the mentor program coordinator in December to confirm which of the student mentors were currently paired with mentees and what the plans were for future pairs. She informed me that four student mentors, two of
whom were part of my research study and two of whom were not, had been paired with mentees in October. We did not discuss which of the mentors were participating in this research study. She also shared with me that because there were more mentors than students from the fall term 2004 returning women's program desiring mentors, she planned to pair the remaining mentors with students from the winter term 2005 class. We also met briefly on a prior occasion to review the Informed Consent Form, which she signed (see Appendix C: Informed Consent Document-Program Coordinator).

I scheduled the second interviews in two separate sets. The second interviews for the women who were paired with mentees in October (Mari and Sharon) were held the second week of February 2005. The second interviews for the women who were paired with mentees in late February (Cheryl, Linda, Mari, and Suzanne) were scheduled and held in late April 2005, except the second interview with Cheryl, which she cancelled.

Prior to the second interview I gave the mentors copies of the Mentee Notification of Study letter (see Appendix F) with stamped return envelopes to give to their mentees to sign and mail back to me. The letter explains that their mentor is taking part in a research study, gives a brief description of the study, and provides the mentee with the opportunity to request that information about her not be shared with the researcher.

By late April it was apparent that the mentees that had been paired with Cheryl and with Linda were not going to be able to participate in the mentoring
program. Additionally, Mari's mentee had decided to delay registering for classes until the following fall term and their interactions had ceased.

The third and final interview with each participant was held in late May of 2005. The final interview with Cheryl was a combination of discussions about the mentoring experience and reflection on the experience.

I interviewed the mentor program coordinator twice to provide for triangulation of the information obtained from the research participants (to support, contradict, or expand on themes and patterns identified by the researcher). The interviews focused on perceptions of the patterns and themes that arose from conversations, and interactions between the Mentoring Program Coordinator with the women student mentors who were participants in the Mentoring Program during the 2004–2005 academic year. The interview(s) with the program coordinator were not held until after the end of the academic year. The program coordinator was not informed regarding which of the mentors elected to participate in the research study until after I finished my interviews. This timing was purposeful, as these mentor/mentee matches are for the academic year ending spring term 2005.

The participant data for this study consisted of interview audio tapes, transcripts of the audio tapes, feedback from the participants on the content of the transcripts, field notes, and observations.
**Ethical Considerations**

I took several actions to address ethical considerations. These included following the Oregon State Human Subject policies and guidelines and obtaining approval from the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) before undertaking this study. Additionally, I requested and received written approval for conducting the study at the community college prior to recruiting participants and conducting this study. I ensured that informed consent was explained in detail to each research participant and I obtained a signed copy of the consent form prior to beginning the first interviews and prior to receiving their demographic information. I also gave copies of this consent form to all participants and reviewed the elements of the informed consent document with them prior to each interview.

After each set of interviews was transcribed, I collected all of the audiotapes from that set from the transcriptionist and gave copies of the transcripts of their own interviews to each student participant. All copies of these audio recordings will be destroyed, once the dissertation has been accepted by the University and I have been notified that I have met all conditions for completion of the Doctorate in Education. The paper and electronic copies of the transcripts have been kept and stored in a secure location and will continue to be so for the minimum of three years after the conclusion of the research study or the length required by the University.

Mentees who were matched with the mentors and agreed to participate in this research study were notified in writing about the design of the research study
and provided with the option of not having information shared about their interactions with the mentor. The student mentors were also instructed not to break any confidences that they have with the mentee during the interview. Their names were all changed to the descriptor “mentee” during the transcription process.

**Strategies for Ensuring Soundness**

The strategies used to ensure soundness of data for this study included:

1) use of a professional transcriptionist to transcribe the audiotapes
2) multiple readings of the transcripts
3) recording of field notes and observations
4) participants’ feedback and checking of their transcripts for accuracy
5) keeping of field notes from the interview experience and observations
6) triangulation of the data with the mentoring program coordinator.

**Summary**

This qualitative study was conducted in the phenomenological tradition to gain a better understanding of the lived experience of women student mentors. The participants were students of a West Coast multi-campus community college. This student-to-student mentoring program (Returning Women Program) is part of the Women’s Resource Center at the inner-city campus of this community college. The mentoring program utilizes graduates of their returning women program to serve as mentors to students entering that program.
The data were collected via in-depth, open-ended interviews, over a period of nine months with the six women who volunteered to be part of this study. Data soundness was addressed by providing research participants with copies of the transcripts to check for accuracy and triangulation information from interviews with the mentoring program manager. This approach to collecting data and checking the data allowed the women to speak in their own voices and to be active participants in the research study.

The women who participated in this study have proven themselves to be leaders on their community college campus. Entering through the Returning Women’s Program for low-income, displaced homemakers, first generation college students, or a combination of these factors, the women have continued on to achieve academic excellence and to pursue careers in professions such as nursing, teaching, and counseling. They are women balancing home lives that include children and elder parents, part-time employment, coursework, and volunteer commitments. The following chapter provides a view into their world and their experience as mentors.
CHAPTER 5

VOICES OF SIX WOMEN MENTORS

Introduction

This chapter presents information obtained from the interviews with the six women mentors with the pseudonyms Cheryl, Karen, Linda, Mari, Sharon, and Suzanne. It first provides an overview of the collective demographics of the participants, then information on the selection of pseudonyms, and then a profile of each woman along with excerpts from each of their interviews. This paints a picture of each participant and her lived experience as a woman student mentor.

The information in this chapter was prepared after I completed a reduction of each individual interview and a reduction of each set of interviews. A sample the horizontalization process of reduction, of the first interview with Sharon, is provided as Appendix G. Phenomenological reduction is a systematic, rigorous way of exploring the data to uncover essences as discussed in Chapter 3. The information gleaned from the reductions and the theme analysis is presented in Chapter 6. The processes of completing the reductions first and then returning to the profiles and excerpts assisted me in suspending or setting aside preconceived ideas about what the experience of mentoring entails and what the experience meant to particular individuals in the study.
Demographics

The six study participants ranged in age from 29 to 51 and represent diverse socioeconomic strata, racial and ethnic heritages, and life paths. Two grew up in extreme poverty. All currently live on less than $1,000 per month income, most on less than $800. Four are first-generation college students.

Table 2: Mentor Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th>1st Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two women stated that they self-identify as Black/African American and the other identify as White/Caucasian. All have children, with the number of children ranging from one to three. Some were the custodial parent, some were in
the midst of legal efforts to regain full or partial custody. The children of two women have moved into adulthood. Two women described themselves as in recovery from addictions.

**Pseudonyms**

To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for each of the mentor participants and for the mentoring program coordinator. Additionally, names of family members were not used. Names of mentors referenced by the participants were abbreviated to their salutation and the first initial of their last name, for example, Mr. E. and Sister M. The name of the program the women participated in to enter college and to mentor was changed to the generic title of Returning Women's Program. The name of the center where the Returning Women's Program is located was not changed as the title Women's Resource Center is common to many college campuses.

The participants were offered the choice of choosing a pseudonym that had personal meaning to them or selecting from a list of names that I provided. The pseudonyms selected by the mentor study participants were Cheryl, Karen, Linda, Mari, Sharon, and Suzanne. I selected the pseudonym Deborah for the program coordinator, with her permission. This name was chosen for its Greek origin and meaning of "voice" or "voice that speaks."
Women’s Stories: Profiles and Interviews

Mari and Sharon were the first two mentors to be paired with a mentee. Deborah, the program coordinator, provided them with the names of their mentees in late October. Cheryl, Karen, Linda, and Suzanne were paired with mentees in late February and began meeting with them in March.

Table 3: Mentor and mentee match and meeting information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Month Matched</th>
<th>Started Meeting</th>
<th>Continued to year end</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Never met, calls not returned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Never met, appointments not kept by mentee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Total of three meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>February</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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Information about each mentor is presented below and includes a profile and excerpts from each of their interviews.

**Cheryl**

**Profile**

Cheryl, a 35-year-old African American mother of two, decided to return to college after being laid off from her job. Cheryl stated that her family had always
encouraged higher education. She had attended college right out of high school with a goal of becoming a teacher. After two years, she became pregnant with her first child and stopped taking college classes. Not long thereafter she obtained a janitorial position with the local school district.

As a single mother with children, Cheryl had been attracted by the wages and benefits that were provided by the local school district where she worked as a janitor for 12 years. All the janitorial employees were laid off when the district chose to change to contracted janitorial services as a cost-cutting measure. Not eligible for federal retraining funds, and with her unemployment benefits running out, she began earnest discussions about her future options with friends and family. At the time of our interviews, her academic goal was to complete the course requirements to become a registered nurse.

Cheryl cites her mother, who was a surgical nurse, as her major support for balancing school and family. Her mom helps her with childcare and encourages her to continue her education. She also spoke of her brother and other close family friends as supportive of her decision to return to college.

At the time of our first interview in late October 2004, she was registered for 12 credit hours for the current term and had been continuously enrolled since completing the returning women’s program in fall term 2003. She was completing courses to support entry into a nursing program, including anatomy classes.
Interviews

Cheryl and I met twice for interviews instead of the projected three times. This occurred because the woman that she was to mentor did not follow through with their scheduled meetings and therefore the mentor-mentee relationship never took place. Due to not having a mentee, Cheryl cancelled our second interview which was to discuss the experience of mentoring. After obtaining guidance from my major professor, I spoke with Cheryl and we decided to meet for a follow-up interview to talk about and reflect on what it was like for her not to have had this relationship and on the experience of being part of the mentoring program.

Our first interview took place in late October 2004 in a private conference room on campus. The first part of the meeting was spent reviewing the informed consent form and the demographic information she had provided me previously. At that time, Cheryl was registered for 12 credit hours and had completed courses in math and psychology during the summer term.

Our conversation focused on what life experience had led Cheryl to decide to serve as a mentor, on mentors in her life, and on what she anticipated the mentoring experience would be like for her. She shared that it was her best friend who had urged her to return to college after she was laid off from her janitor position.
When reflecting on that experience of returning to college she recounts the help her best friend provided in moving her toward enrollment:

Collected my unemployment and that ran out. My best friend told me “you’re not working now, go back to school, go back to school.” So she held my hand. And she got me started and helped me with all the papers ... cause I was, just like I said, dragging my feet in the sand... she got me in contact with Deborah at the Women’s Resource Center.

Cheryl took her friend’s advice and participated in the Returning Women’s Program in fall term 2003. After completing that 9-week program, she decided to continue on and registered for classes.

Her comments on completing the returning women’s program illustrate the impact that it has had on her current college experience and address the relational way in which women interact.

The program was fun; it was like somebody holding my hand and you can do this. You can take baby steps before you take your big leap into the water. So, it was enjoyable, ... it was an empowering experience for me, because I still have a group of friends that I still know on campus from the same group... that I can still talk to... If we needed any help, we could bounce it off each other or just have a cup of coffee, or do something so you could see a familiar face. That makes it so much easier coming here on this campus and saying, “Dang, I don’t know anybody!” It’s like, “I know a couple people, hey,” or I could sit down in the cafeteria and you can do your homework and I could do my homework. Even though we don’t have any classes together, but it’s just nice to know somebody.

When asked about mentors in her life, Cheryl stated that her best friend, family members (mother and brother), and two teachers had been her mentors.
In describing her mother as a mentor she shared this information:

Oh, my Mom is my savior. I would not be here if it wasn’t for my Mom. She helps me out so much. I appreciate her so much. Nobody will ever know, not even her. You know I tell her, but I don’t know if she believes me. She’s like, “Oh, it’s just what I do.” It’s just… you are saving my sanity.

She says, “Go for it.” She’s really happy that I’m back to doing what I need to do. Getting back on path, she goes, “No, you stayed off path” and I go, “Well, why didn’t you tell me?” “Cause you have to find your own way. And you know, I’m the mom, but you have to go on your little journeys, and your little travels.” Oh my gosh! She’s like, “No, you have to find your way. And now that you’ve found your way, you’re good and I’m not going to worry about you now.”

Other mentors Cheryl described were two teachers. She described a seventh grade teacher (Mr. E.) as “really positive” and “really supportive” and Sister M. who was “so feisty,” “the hardest to push me,” “I really loved her.”

The next part of our interview moved from discussing mentors in her life to what she anticipated the mentoring experience would be like for her. Cheryl was very eager to have the mentoring experience: She stated, “I can’t wait to have a mentee.” When asked what she thought mentoring would be like, she responded:

I think it’d be like, being able to help somebody around the campus, and since things are changing so quickly, it might be a learning experience for both of us. …like the library and checking in at the computers, and all the new buildings going up.

That’s what’s important, just to have somebody to say, “Look, I don’t know what to do.” Or “I know what to do, but just let me just throw it in the air”…. and say ‘okay’” and then I’ve said it out loud, that works. So just being there, and being any kind of help that I can be.
She shared her thoughts on what her mentee might be like:

Hopefully, excited to be in school. I know the challenge. I’m sure a lot of women -- most of them are women coming back -- have homes, and children, and they’re probably scared, and anxious, and excited.

We spoke about her feeling of participating in the mentoring program for returning women. She commented, “I’m really excited to get started, I want a mentee. I’m ready to be a mentor, I want to be a help, and like I said, let someone get close.

….most of the times it’s usually just “can I talk to you, because I need to get stuff off my chest.” Currently she is an informal mentor for two women friends and freely gives her time to lend an ear to frustrations and concerns and to be a sounding board. “And now… I don’t have an official mentee; it’s my friends that are starting up in college.”

She voiced some concern about whether she would be matched in November, “if they have enough” new students interested or if she would not be matched until the winter term, and have to wait until January 2005.

Unfortunately, Cheryl’s mentee did not follow through, so the standard second interview was skipped. The final interview took place in the Women’s Resource Center conference room at the end of spring term 2005. During that interview we covered the questions from the standard second and third interviews: What is the mentoring experience like and reflecting back on the experience. As Cheryl did not end up in a mentoring pair that worked out, we focused on reflecting back on the experience. She was disappointed that she was not paired with a
mentee until toward the end of winter term and that her mentee did not follow through.

In late February, Cheryl was paired with a student from the winter term 2005 Returning Women’s Program. She contacted the woman at least twice and did not receive a response.

If somebody really needs some help they’ll act like they’re a little more interested. And she didn’t seem too interested. …Didn’t return the calls, never returned my calls. It was always a bad time, never was a good time. Anytime of the day was a bad time it seemed like. So that’s enough clues for me.

… I figure it’s not worth me chasing. If somebody really needs help, they’ll come for it. Especially, when I’ve offered more than… two or three times.

I was a little bit hurt because you would think if somebody would take the time to say look I need some help they would at least meet you half way or all of the way. So… but everything works out for a reason. So, hopefully she got the help she needed or found somebody else to get some help from.

In reflecting back over the past academic year, she felt that she had learned useful information from the mentor training seminar. She described the training as “fun” and “knowledgeable.” She talked about how now she is mentoring a good friend and that the skills she learned from the training are useful with her friend and with her children.

So I just did my own mentoring with my own people. My best friend, she’s in college now, and my daughter, she’s getting into high school.
She continued sharing her comments, as follows:

They’ll do a lot of sounding off and just bouncing stuff off and this, that, “No I don’t want it this way or I want it this way.” Try and just figure it out for themselves, so they’re doing a lot of talking awhile until they get it or ask you a little question ... So yeah, patience and a lot of listening.

In reflecting on any changes that had occurred due to her participation in the mentoring program, she shared:

I believe I am still the same person as I was, ... when I started and wanted to be a mentor. Now I just figure now I’m a mentor to two different people who really want me to be a mentor to them, whether they be via children or, you know, like I said, my best friend, my girlfriend.

*Participant Summary*

Cheryl was disappointed that she was not paired with a mentee at the beginning of the year and the match with her mentee did not work out. She feels that the skills she gained from participating in the mentoring program were valuable and that she used those skills now in informal mentoring with her children and friends.

*Karen*

*Profile*

Karen is 51 years old, African American, and has two adult daughters. She is now raising her grandson whom she has adopted. She is a first-generation college student and the first in her family to complete high school. Her academic goal is to obtain a bachelor’s in psychology and then go on for a master’s in early childhood education.
Karen had previously obtained a certificate in library services from this same community college. She had hoped to work in a K–12 school library but with budget cuts, schools in the area were not hiring. Instead she went to work for a building supply company. She left after a disagreement with a store manager that she feels was racially motivated and used to end her employment. Her employment prior to entering college included 13 years assembling circuit boards, receptionist at a day spa, and assistant to the manager of a low-income housing complex.

Karen experienced extreme poverty while growing up and did not have strong educational role models in her life. She began working at age 15 to support herself. A Hispanic family that lived near her took her under their wing and provided her with her first job and help in getting her own apartment. Later in her life, an older woman gave her a place to stay while she was pregnant with her second daughter. This woman and another friend treated her well and provided her with money to help her move to a new state to start a new life.

In her new state she met several individuals she describes as mentors. Some were community members and some were staff at the community college. They helped her gain employment, and find a place to live, and they urged her to get her GED and continue with college classes.

Karen has been accepted at a local state university and a small private university. Both have offered her financial aid. In late May 2005, she was leaning toward the private university. In June 2005, she graduated from the community college with an associate's degree in general studies.
Interviews

Karen and I met for the projected three interviews. Two of the interviews took place on campus in a conference room and one took place, at her request, at her home. Karen was not matched with a mentee until the end of February 2005, with the actual meetings starting in March 2005.

Our first interview took place at the end of October 2004, in a conference room on campus. We discussed her life history that lead up to her participating in the Returning Women's Program and later volunteering to serve as a mentor. We also talked about what she thought the upcoming mentoring experience would be like and how mentors had impacted her life. She shared that a mentor early in her life included a neighbor, a prostitute and heroin addict, who gave her sound advice on what not to do when she grew up. “She would talk to me, she would read to me, she would comb my hair… and thank God it never happened to me.”

Other mentors were a married couple who found her an apartment and job when she was 15, a woman who befriended her and helped her with a place to live and money to move, the manager of a low-income housing complex who gave her a job and helped her “develop,” and a woman at the community college. In describing the woman who gave her a job at the housing complex, she said, “She pulled no punches but she never said harsh words.” When speaking about coming to the community college to get her GED, she spoke of one woman on campus who helped her greatly “She was a black woman on a mission” who quizzed her and referred her to various programs and staff.
After getting her GED, Karen went to work for a paint brush manufacturer but quit after about 2 years and returned to college. She entered and completed the library media program. At that time she heard about the Returning Women’s Program but mistakenly thought that it was only for women who already had college degrees, as she put it, “elite women.” When she returned to college after not being able to find employment in a school library, she connected with the program.

She commented on the program, saying:

It’s about... connecting, and being a woman, and rejoicing and finding out really where is your branch. And ... learning to put the leaves on it so you can be full and fulfilled, and successful

When asked about what she felt the mentoring experience would be like, Karen said:

Oh just, you know, giving bits of information, and ... giving ideas when we’re having our conversations. Talk a little bit about...certain things and ... if they ask me a question, be as honest as I can. If I don’t know, then just say, “Well, why don’t we work on it together and try to find out the answer.” Because I could use that information, too. But you know, just say, “I don’t know” if I don’t know... And ...if my mentee is ... under duress, and just, just freaking out..., just be honest and let her know ... where my comfort zone is with this. ...

So I’m, I’m really excited about it... but I am really nervous. Because...... I do want to be very responsible for her. I want to be able to... answer questions for her with intelligence, with knowledge. .... just talk, woman to woman. You know, adult to adult, share things...

Because she might be older than I am, you know, and she might be younger than I am. I don’t know who she’s going to be. But I know she’s gonna be great.
The second interview took place in late April 2004 at her house, which she requested due to scheduling conflicts. We discussed her experience interacting with her mentee. I asked “Now that you have been meeting with your mentee for bit, what’s it like to be a mentor?” She responded:

It’s like being a big sister. …you can’t be overwhelming. You just answer questions and you… go through little thoughts with them. And more like, you’re the sign up person listening to this person. …they have this problem. If you don’t really say much while they are talking to you, they end up figuring it out themselves. …that is what my experience has been.

… I gotta be very, very careful not to bring in my own personal things, you know, my experiences. Because that’s not really, I don’t feel that’s what it’s all about. I want to keep it comfortable. I just want to be careful because I am human, I am very emotional and sometimes I may need a soundboard but I gotta remember that I’m her soundboard. …I have a soundboard and I need to use my own soundboard and not her, because she needs me and I have someone that I use.

I really feel authoritative. You know, I feel like, I can’t explain it. I feel real important, you know, I do I feel really important. I feel smart… I feel, and even though I may not have the answers to what she’s asking me, I’m confident enough to say I don’t know that and I need to give you a name of someone that might answer that.

Just human-human, you know. Just people meeting, people talking about… where I’ve been, where they’ve been, where she’s been. And she can help me there. Her conversation, you know, can trigger something in my brain going, “Wow, I never thought of it that way.” You know. Just because I’m the mentor doesn’t make me the queen of the hill, just because she is a mentee, because that mentee has taken a different fork than I have. It’s just that I so happened to be academically at a different level than she is at because she’s starting now. She’s trying to climb all the hurdles I’ve been through. And that’s all that is.
Karen shared that her interactions with her mentee had been mainly about academics, degree and transfer requirements, and balancing home and work. She stated that she and her mentee had discussed dual enrollment, how to access advising, being careful of what will transfer and what will not transfer, and what it was like for them to be community college students.

She also found personal benefit from serving as a mentor. She said, “I’m just glad that I’m a part of this program because I’m learning something. I’m learning something, and what a cool thing to put in my resume.”

During the last interview, I asked Karen to reflect back on the experience of being a mentor and relating to her mentee. She shared the following reflection:

She’s 30 years old. And, she’s kind of, like, doing her own thing. I’d seen her on campus and then when I got introduced, I was like, “Oh my god, hey girl” and so it was like a good match... was a really good match. I’ll talk a lot about what I’m doing ... and just say, “Oh god, this and this, I went through this process, girl” and I went through this process and she kind of listens to me...she just feels her way through...

Reflecting on what the experience has meant to her, Karen said:

It means that I get to share ideas. I get to experience beginnings and endings and I get to make a new friend, make a connection. Mentoring is a big job, being a mentor is a big job... I learned that there is someone out there just like me even though she doesn’t look like me. And I think that me and (mentee name) was a really good match, I really do because we are a lot alike as far as emotionally needing our space. And one thing I learned about being a mentor is that I think I want to continue being a mentor my whole life. I know I will attach myself to somebody because that’s just human nature. You find someone that you’re comfortable with and you more or less attach yourself to them. .....it was just... a comfortableness.
She continued with her description as:

I’ve learned even through listening to other people talk that it’s a privilege to get assigned as a mentor to someone, but that doesn’t mean it’s a good match... But the thing is, the work and the strength is that you can keep it together and you still... you can still talk and smile and say, hey girl... and stuff like that. And then they feel comfortable to say, “I got these food stamp papers to fill out, I don’t know what to do” and they feel confident enough to ask you because some people feel like I don’t want nobody to know that I can’t do this and then you be a person that they don’t mind saying that they can’t do it. That’s what you there for, to help them to do it, and if you can’t do it then you’ll find somebody else that can help you so you can help her.

Participant Summary

Karen enjoyed seeing her mentee and the experience of mentoring. She found that it was a lot of listening with some requests for specific information such as how does the process of dual enrollment work and how to access advising through the college. For her, it was a positive experience and personally rewarding to learn that she had the skills and disposition to serve as a mentor and had knowledge that was of value to others.

Linda

Profile

Linda, age 41, strongly affiliates with her Jewish faith and her Irish ancestry. She decided to return to college after her marriage of 24 years ended. She has two adult children. Her adult identity had been as a stay at home mom, wife, and active community volunteer. She home schooled her children, coordinated a food co-op, and volunteered at the hospital where her husband worked.
She is a first-generation college student. Her father, a WWII veteran, completed a nine-month culinary program on the GI Bill, and her mother completed courses at a business technical school and then went on to work for the U.S. Army. She had originally planned to go to college after high school, "I was going to med school, all through high school, and I got frightened." Upset by the "thought of moving away from home, so far from home," she did not go to college. "I panicked, I was young, and I took the easy way out and got married." After 24 years, her marriage "basically dissolved, like someone wrote on a chalk board and then just erased it." She looked for work. After applying "for over 70 jobs" and having no luck finding employment, she decided to apply for college admission.

She had previously applied and been accepted at Washington State University where she was offered a scholarship. Soon after being notified of the scholarship, a close family member was critically injured in a vehicle accident. Assisting with his recovery took precedent over attending college. After a period of time, she discovered the Returning Women's Program through their brochure and decided that the displaced homemaker description fit her well. Feeling, "I can't be more displaced, I'm living on the couch," she visited the program and liked the interaction she saw. She entered the community college via the Returning Women's Program spring term 2003 and started regular classes in the fall that same year. At the time of the first interview she had completed 41 credit hours and was enrolled for 10 hours for fall term 2004.
Her career direction is currently in flux. She had wanted to complete a physician assistant program and then move toward critical care nursing. She is still looking at the medical field, but not at nursing.

Interviews

The first interview took place in October 2004 in one of the private study rooms at the community college library. We reviewed the informed consent information from the form she had signed in September. I also covered voluntary participation and anonymity during subsequent telephone conversations. In one case, additional discussions took place by telephone. Notes from the telephone conversations were provided to the mentor and protected in the same manner as all the transcripts.

Linda was matched with a mentee in late February 2005. Unfortunately, the mentee did not keep the two appointments that Linda had scheduled with her during March. Each time, Linda waited for over 30 minutes, each time at the Women’s Resource Center. After consulting with the mentoring program coordinator, Linda decided not to schedule additional meetings.

I offered Linda the option of continuing on with interviews as part of this research project. She agreed that it would be of value, but said that in-person meetings would be difficult. Therefore, we agreed to have our following discussions by telephone. Those two telephone interviews covered what it was like for her going through the mentoring training and then not having the mentee follow through. She also reflected on that experience and the experience of being part of
the mentoring program. Although the same content was covered in each session, the resulting information was not as in-depth, due to the limitations of taking notes while listening on the telephone and not having the nonverbal communication of a person-to-person meeting. Linda’s story is included even with these limitations, as the insights she shared reflected her journey during this process and the impact that preparing for the mentoring experience had on her life.

Linda brought to this study her past experience serving as an informal mentor during volunteer work at a hospital, where she was seen as a natural mentor for two student interns.

I’m a mom, so they’re younger than me, they’re going to school, and the nursing staff said “Could you mentor them? Just make sure they’re going in the right direction. Make sure that they’re not working too many hours volunteering because they don’t get paid for it, so that it doesn’t mess up their studies and keep them focused, because both of them are away from home.

It’s a … they’re alone. I’m like, no problem. So it’s keeping an eye on them, like their mom, but not really. For me, I look at the whole thing as, you point them in the right direction, you make sure that they keep going...

When reflecting back on her experience when she was selected for the Returning Women’s Program in the spring of 2003, she shared these thoughts:

If someone else hadn’t of stepped in and truly shown me a brochure about the Women’s Resource Center. I went, “What? That’s it!” I mean it was truly, literally, a little flyer that saved my life, literally saved my life. I look at that and turned that thing around for months... I immediately called Deborah... When I went in and talked with her and she goes, “Okay.” And I remember that very time... “I’m going to school!”
When asked to tell me about mentors in her life, she talked about her grandmother and mother as her mentors.

Oh yeah - Grandmother. I miss her terribly. She was the biggest, very positive, very focused, you know. You know what you want to do, do it. And same with my mom.

Caring. Um, non-judgmental. Non-judgmental. More of a... she’s from the old country, from Ireland. Caring, just loving. All the time in the world. There was not one question all growing up that was not answered. I could walk in and ask her anything at any time. No question was too dumb, too silly, too I don’t have time for you. They had all the time in the world. And I said many a time she’d be, you know, I would walk in and be cooking or something at the stove, I’d grab an apron and we’d talk. No holds barred. Any question. What was it like when...? What do you think about this? And it was the best, and I do the same with my sons.

She shared her thoughts on mentoring another woman who is just starting back to college: what the experience may be like for her:

Um, helping someone along the same path, giving them the same chance I did. 100%. Nothing more and nothing less, looking at her and going, “You can do it!” She’d probably will be coming in with not a lot of positives... the way that she feels on the inside

We thought that... we all said when we’ve gotten to the returning women’s program. I feel dumb. You know, you don’t want to say it out loud, but you come to the college and go “I’m lost, I’m really lost, oh god, am I lost.” ..... and not wanting to say it, and everybody, and thinking everybody else is smarter than you.
Speaking about the experience of her cohort from the Returning Women’s Program she said:

And I look at it and go, “Everybody goes together.” We all get to the finish line at the same time, we’ll all get there eventually, and not being locked because I’ve seen ... we’ve all changed. All of us in the returning women’s program. This is what we said, “This is what I’m going to school to do.” But then after you go you have more of a calling, you know, like, more of a focus. And you redefine it and you fine tune it. Every last one of the people I went to school with has said, “Well, this is what I was going to do, but now…” They’re still doing it, but it’s not as locked in.

During the second interview in April 2005, Linda described what had occurred with the mentee she had been assigned to:

My mentee was a no show - we never connected. I set up two meetings and she did not come to either. She has some issues with family medical needs. Not sure if she will start classes.

I asked Linda to share with me how the experience had been for her, to be without a mentee:

Frustrating, time consuming trying to reach her, wait for her. ... just didn’t work out. I just mentor others with my time. I mentored when I was at the hospital and I do that here also - just take people under my wing. ....mentor training was good experience, and I see some of the other women that were in the training on campus, and we talk. ... would of liked to be matched earlier and that it had worked out. But I like mentoring the women at the gym,... informal mentoring. We all have needs. I help where I can.

I got a job at the gym and I see other Returning Women’s Program women there. I help and mentor these women, kinda group mentoring. Giving them information on financial aid, and classes. Refer them to the career center and advisor - but to be careful of what advisors.
The third interview occurred in early June 2005. The focus was to reflect on the experience of being part of the mentoring program.

I'm a people person - love being a mentor, watching people grow up, learning, it's always a new adventure... Love new job at the gym, being able to mentor a lot of people at one chunk.

The mentor training experience was a good experience, good group, good information. Training helped me out a lot. No joke. I still refer to it, the mentor folder - before I would commit to an answer, I would take time for a self check on boundaries, check the folder, check on boundaries.

Experience of mentoring is good. It didn't work out with my assigned mentee, but I have the group of women at the gym to mentor and help. I am always mentoring, sharing resources and such.

**Participant Summary**

Although Linda would like to have had the mentor/mentee match, she felt very positive about the informal mentoring role she played with the women who stop by to see her where she works in the on-campus gym and physical education facilities. She found the information she learned in the mentor training seminar useful and continues to refer back to the materials, especially the information on setting personal and professional boundaries.

**Mari**

**Profile**

Mari is 29 years old, Caucasian, and divorced with two elementary school-aged children. She finished high school and then attended a Bible school for a few months before leaving. She married soon after and her spouse preferred a wife who did not work outside of the home.
Mari experienced a turbulent childhood living on the road with her father, then living with her mother for a brief time, followed by foster care. Exposed early to alcohol and drugs, her life became somewhat more stable in her teens when she lived with her grandparents. She later moved in with friends she met through a church and lived with them through her two years of high school and time in Bible school. Her passion in high school was art, especially murals.

Her previous employment has been limited. She has been a director of a Bible camp, a Sunday school teacher, and a school volunteer. When her children were in pre-school she wanted to take college classes but her husband did not support her returning to college. She and a friend opened an art store, where she could create and teach art. “My mural business was going great, I was doing a mural a month,” she said. This endeavor ended when her husband decided she should not work outside of the home.

Due to a dissolving marriage and custody battle, in the summer of 2003, Mari decided to move from her hometown to the city where the community college is located. She moved in with friends, enrolled in the Returning Women’s Program in July 2003, and “had a job by 5:00 p.m. that same day.”

At the time of our first interview in October 2004, Mari had taken 42 credit hours and was taking 13 credits. She was also working at the Women’s Resource Center as a work/study student, and serving as a member of the center’s leadership team. She stated that her academic goal is to complete the prevention specialist
program award through the alcohol and drug counseling program at the college. She would like to continue on and obtain her associate’s degree.

Interviews

Mari and I meet three times for interviews, as projected, and also connected for review of the interview transcripts. Mari was matched with her mentee in October and met with her three times before the mentee decided to delay entering college and discontinued the relationship. Even through the meetings ended before the end of the academic year, Mari and I decided to continue with all three interviews to provide us an opportunity to discuss what it was like for her as a mentor to have the mentor-mentee relationship end prematurely. This also provided her a chance to reflect on the experience of being a mentor, and the experience of being part of the mentoring program.

Our first interview took place at the end of October 2004. Mari shared information about her life history, the path that led to her enrolling in the Returning Women’s Program, and her decision to serve as a mentor.

During the interview we discussed past mentors in her life. Mari stated that her mentors when growing up included her aunt, an elementary school teacher, and an art teacher in high school.

I mean my aunt was, she raised nine kids and when my dad would pass through… I would stay with her, and she was kind of like my surrogate mom. Braiding my hair, and my mom were best friends when my dad and her were together. So, she kind of looked out for me for my mom. ….Just kind of looking up to her and seeing how she dealt with things. I think it's a lot of learning through observation.
My third grade teacher, she was from Japan and she absolutely loved my name... and everything I was going through, actually I had a few good school teachers, I liked school teachers. I, I even wanted to be school teacher, and I still kinda do, because I want to work with kids, and I, loved being at school because it was my outlet. It got me away from the nightmares at home. ... I could do my art work and they encouraged that because that was like sparking myself. A lot of my school teachers were just absolutely wonderful. Um, Mrs. H. was adorable. I mean, I was in third grade and I was as big as she was... And she would just give me a hug, you know in the mornings, you know, and no matter what I looked like...

Other than that, my art teacher when I moved in with my foster family, when I was a junior in high school, I met a wonderful artist. She, I call her my art goddess, totally inspired me and gave me free rein. ...like I said, I lived in the art room, and she got ecstatic over the excitement and the enthusiasm I showed.

Mari shared what it had been like for her to be part of the Returning Women’s Program and how she had felt accepted by the women there.

Making, being able to assert yourself, and, you know, “I’m really not comfortable with this,” and I never could say that before, and I still am putting names to my feelings.

But, I get so proud of myself when I can assert myself in the face of a man who never let me speak, and tell him “you need to get out of my house, you’re making me uncomfortable, you’re crossing my boundaries, and you’re not listening to me. You need to leave.” And I’ll stand by it.

And it feels wonderful. And then I literally feel like dancing a jig because I’m so proud of myself. You know, I’m just like, “I can do this!” And, the women there are incredible. Each of us had our difficulties, but we didn’t have to say anything sometimes, you know, I mean, I just “Hey, do you need a hug?” That’s all it takes. And I miss it. I actually started a ... Alumni Group. And so we meet once a week, although... we wish it was like three days a week
In projecting what the experience of having a mentee would be like for her, she stated, “I’m hoping to be encouraging.” She offered the following:

... we all travel similar paths, but you know, we all have our different takes on it and everything else, and I’m really hoping that, whoever she is, my main thing is letting her know she’s not alone. I felt alone a lot. And that’s the greatest thing about this campus, I know I’m not alone. No matter what it is, I know someone’s been there.

I’m hoping to make a friend in a sense ...I want to encourage her to know that she can handle it, she can juggle it all. I mean, I’m going to school full time, I’m holding two jobs, still manage to baby sit two days a week, see my kids one specific day a week and every other weekend. ...you sit down, and you just make it work, and you still spend time with, for yourself.

During our second interview we focused on what the mentoring experience had been like for Mari when she was seeing her mentee. We also discussed what it was like for her when the mentor-mentee relationship did not continue. Our second interview took place in February 2005. In response to my inquiry as to what the relationship had been like for her, she responded:

Well it’s not been what I expected. Basically because my mentee decided not to come to school this term and she wants to put it off. She said that she was only going to take this term off and come back in the spring. Um, but I don’t know. She is having a lot of marital problems, so that’s just been kind of wrapping it up. So, it’s the relationship has kinda declined because I think, she’s not as excited as she was when we first started meeting because she had all these hopes and want she can get into and what she really wanted and I kinda feel like she’s been dragged back to wherever she was before.
We talked about the meetings and conversations that did take place between them and what the experience was like for Mari:

Well the first time I was really nervous. The first time I was introduced to her was on Halloween Friday, so I was pretty decked out and I felt, I wished I hadn't been so dressed up and crazily because it was my first impression with her. The first time she was a little kinda skittish like you know, hi I don't really want to talk much. I was just kinda telling her my experience and reassuring her about all the resources the women's resource center has for everything and we just keep trying to get more in here. She just started opening up after the second time and then that morning she was just really excited and saying she wanted to do this and that... "I am going to here and this is what I going to do." So that was kinda cool.

I told her that I would let her know about financial aid. Which I did, I called and left a message about that. I just haven't heard from her. So, I left it back in her court. Just because I've called twice and haven't heard anything back and I don't want to pester her or push her. I'm kinda afraid of doing that. But I don't know what else to do. [Long pause] So, I was kind of hoping for a little bit more because I thought she would continue with school and it would be a little bit easier to communicate and share things.

Mari continues to use her mentoring skills on an informal basis with other students that drop into the Women's Resource Center and women who are students of the Returning Women's Program:

I make a lot of friends here now and in a sense I know I am very encouraging person and that's really exciting to keep up with the people that come through the Women's Resource Center. There's a couple women now that come in and I remember – How was your last math test? How did you do? What are you going to do now? And to me I am just implementing a lot of those skills, letting them know that I'm there on a different level if they need it.
Her description of the experience with informal mentoring continues:

They are seeking the encouragement that I am already giving. So it’s kinda neat to know that and to know that other people are looking up to me in a sense. It helps me to strive a little bit harder, you know, knowing that the field that I am going into I am a natural fit for and I know that. It’s exciting for me because of my enthusiasm, my passion for it; I know that people see that...

I meet with a couple of ladies now like Mondays at 1 o’clock and Fridays at 1 o’clock. We go have lunch, chat, what’s going on, how’d your test go, I walk her to class. I am helping her with scholarships because she has never applied for a scholarship before. So you know, she’s like I need your help with this, I’ve never done this. I’m like ok and that feels good. It fulfills that thing in me, that’s giving back.

Our third and final interview was held at the end of May 2005 on campus.

This discussion was about looking back, reflecting on the experience and what meaning it had for Mari. Her comments start with the support she provides to women in the alumni group:

There’s a group of the… Alumni and we had a club, meeting once a week kind of to check in and just caught up with our lives. So I still see them. I still have a few of them that seek me out just to kind of talk and have somebody to lean on, you know and vent on for a minute. … it’s a good feeling. It’s a good feeling. So I love seeing their progression and getting them to where they want to go and being able to give them resources and referrals. So I feel useful.
Reflecting back on the experience of serving as a mentor and being part of the mentoring programs she shared the following:

Well, it was kind of exciting. It made me a little bit more aware of knowing that someone else might be needing the information, might be needing the resources. And knowing where their interests lie and stuff, it kind of just kept my eyes and ears open for more information. Like running across something that made me think of them. Because even now with some of the women that do come in and I know their interests and they need help with something, I'm able to, I like to be able to try to find the answers that they're seeking. So I can kind of point them that way.

It had a big impact on my year because... it felt good to take that extra training and learning the difference between being a mentor and being a friend. I mean that's still,...really interesting you know, because I didn't really realize. I'm not one for a lot of boundaries so I wasn't really aware of different boundaries and different levels because I just kind of keep living. But knowing that I have a right and knowing I can say, well I don't, you know, this doesn't work for me.

I felt empowered by that and being with a group of women who all had the same goals you know and were all looking at a new project and just being able to express that.

Regarding her academic goals and future plans, she stated that they had not changed and that she felt on track with her goals:

I finished my prevention specialist award last term. Next June, I'll get my associate degree with an Alcohol and Drug Counseling Certificate. I'm going on to pursue a Bachelor in Social Work at ... College starting fall term 2006.

Mari feels that she continues to serve as a mentor to other women through her leadership position with the returning women’s program at the Women’s Resource Center. There are two women that she meets with on a weekly basis.
Participant Summary

She stated concern for her mentee and whether the individual would be able to return to college. She has continued on with providing informal mentoring to women who use the services of the Women’s Resource Center. As a member of the student leadership team for the Center, she interacts with students on a frequent basis. The mentor training seminar was very valuable to her in learning to set personal and professional boundaries.

Sharon

Profile

Sharon is 43 years old, Caucasian, and married with a son in elementary school. She attended the returning women’s program in the spring of 2003. Her return to college was the first time she had enrolled at a college since she was a teenager. Sharon, like other women in this study, spoke of the difficult balance between school, employment, and family responsibilities. An active parent who takes keen interest in her son’s education and describes ferrying her son to various sports games, she spoke of the important role and support her husband provides “that’s the only reason I am really able to go to school is because I have the other half.”

She grew up in a family that valued education. Her father had attended some college and then joined the military. He urged Sharon and her siblings to go to college although she and her half sister were the only ones to follow his advice.
After graduating from high school, Sharon registered for classes at a local college. She did not complete the classes and looking back feels that she “was not emotionally ready” at that time to pursue higher education.

She worked at various jobs over the years, initially in fast food, then at a bank, followed by employment at an optical lab making lenses, and at health club. During her employment at the bank she took business courses such as typing and principles of business that were paid for by the bank as part of the employee benefits program.

She started at the community college through the returning women’s program after “taking some wrong turns in life” and having “a personal life changing incident” which caused her to reflect on the value education and her future direction.

A factor in her career direction is her status as a recovering addict and the legal issues including convictions she faced because of her addiction. Now over five years clean and sober, her academic goals include majoring in Sociology and obtaining an associate degree. She would like to work with juvenile offenders.

**Interviews**

Sharon and I meet three times, as projected, for interviews with additional meetings for review of transcripts. All of our meetings were held on campus in private conference rooms. We began each interview with a review of informed consent and safekeeping of the data.
During our first interview we talked about her experiences that led up to her decision to attend college, take part in the returning women’s program, and later to serve as a mentor for new participants of that program.

Sharon’s first attempt at attending this community college did not go well. She went to the admissions office at another campus and was sent home “with a stack of paperwork and that I didn’t know what to do with it.” Finding herself overwhelmed with the paperwork required for admission and financial aid she did not follow through at that campus.

A friend, who had gone through the program, introduced Sharon to information about the returning women’s program at Women’s Resource Center. After her experience at the other campus she decided to sign up for the returning women’s program so she could “get that step forward and start moving through it.”

She completed the returning women’s program in the spring of 2003 and enrolled in classes the following term. She has been continuously enrolled since that time.

When asked about mentors in her life, Sharon shared that her mentors had been her parents and teachers.

And, I think for me it, it’s based on more your parents… your teachers. It’s just wherever there’s influences and those values and things come into play in your life that makes you have that decision to go back to school. Oh, just, that…teachers just being positive in themselves. … teach you that you can... And so, given the time, I was going to come back in here and, giving it a shot. I have that in my mind that I can do well. And so, with a little effort everything is achievable. So teachers are definitely a big influence in, in, anybody’s life.
She commented on one of her first mentors, her first grade teacher:

One that comes to my mind the most is my first grade teacher. And the first grade teacher when you’re initially getting started, just having that extra praise, that extra encouragement, that extra everything, ... get your work done and get to do the little extra things... And that’s the influence.

Another area we discussed was her experience being part of the returning women’s program. She stated “the biggest thing of it was the support from Deborah. You know, just the support of somebody, being able to tell you, you basically can. You know, “you can do this.” She also shared an observation about the relationship with the other women in the program and their feeling of identity:

You know, it’s an identity that you have with the class that carries with you, throughout your little school career here, known as the... (Returning Women’s Program) Women.

Her thoughts on what the relationship would be like for her in serving as a mentor follows:

And what it’s going to look like is just basically... reaching out a hand to another... because they’re going to be coming in and going through the same struggles that I just went through. And...to be able to have somebody they can ask them questions to, that’s not going to make them feel like they’re stupid for asking. Because when you’re kicked back out into the college campus life, and trying to adjust, and get along, you feel like you almost should know these things, but you don’t, and, so I just want to be able to be there and to help them and give them the resources that they need. ... if I can’t answer it, find out who, and just because I’ve been here now going on my fifth term at this campus, and have done a little extra work study and stuff, and in the office, and different places I’ve gotten to know quite a few of the resources and I hope that will be helpful for them. Allow them to make their own decisions. When they do make their decisions, be able to send them to the professionals that they need to be sent to, to give them a little guidance, to be able to help them take the next step.
The second interview with Sharon took place in February 2005. This interview was to discuss what the mentoring experience had been like for her now that she was active in her role as a mentor. She had started meeting with her mentee in November, who she had been assigned to in October 2004. She had found the mentoring experience to be rewarding and at times a reciprocal relationship with each party helping the other. Following are excerpts from that conversation.

...the experience has been very interesting to say the least. My mentee happens to have a lot of spark, a lot of energy, a lot of determination, a lot of spirit. And so it's making it pretty easy. I don't know, at least at this point in the game, who's mentoring who, you know, is what it kinda comes down to. It's one almost helping the other... because I have been here now for going on a couple of years...where that initial real motivation and drive... has waned out a little bit. And so I kinda get to see it in her again... mentoring her has been rather easy. Like I said she's got that serious determination and motivation and pride and everything with her grades and showing me her papers...

I think people are very motivated and independent to do their own thing and then there is always those lingering questions that come as you feel comfortable asking someone. So that you can move along through your process, and feeling comfortable in doing so. ...But for the most part these people come out very motivated, and very determined. And learn how to ask questions as they go through their process. So it's been a good experience.

Discussing the specifics of the experience with the mentee, the details of their meeting and activities, Sharon shared the following:

I know we are going to be registering for more classes coming up soon and we've already touched based with each other that she's going to be needing a little help doing that and you know I helped her on the first, the first time, so... Just it's just trying to get things down.
A lot of the questions in the beginning and that’s coming into the next term is with the registration. Figuring out the schedule, and there’s been computer questions because she is new. Uh, let’s see what else - there were just minor questions about verbs, past pretense verbs things like that.

Our final interview was held in late May 2005 at the Women’s Center. This interview was a time of reflection, looking back over the time Sharon had served as a mentor and what that experience had been like for her. Sharon’s reflection is provided below:

... in looking back and reflecting, in the beginning it was extremely exciting. ... I was really looking forward to it and ... and as I began and I got my mentee, in the beginning... it was a learning process for me. And it was enriching. It was exciting. Now at that point, it felt like those little suggestions and helpful things... she was utilizing. And it was pure excitement when I gotta see how excited she was when she got her first grades... A’s and B’s, just that excitement. And then as time went on, the time spent with her having a full schedule and me and my schedule... it got kind of diminished and that’s expected because... when someone has the characteristics of a good student like I said, they get pretty resource savvy themselves. And so just learning acceptance. Everyone has their process and... sure questions come up in your mind: Am I being as helpful as I can? or what not, but all in all it was a good experience and it’s always encouraging to see somebody get along their way

In reflecting on the experience of participating in the mentor training seminar with the other mentors in September 2004, she shared the following insights:

I am still very close with all the women,... relatively we speak a lot when we see each other, the women that were involved in that. And that was a real positive experience, real positive experience and we still talk regularly...as we see each other. It’s kind of like a bonding type thing ... Yeah.
Sharon’s academic goals changed somewhat over the past nine months.

Now beginning her third year, she is broadening her list of options but remains set on a helping profession. When asked if any of her goals had changed over the past year, her response was:

Actually they have. Just observing what I’m learning in sociology ... what I can do better for the community. And sparked on a few ideas but it’s gonna ... take some further education ... and target a particular population, the recovering population. And, how I could best try and help.

When probed further about changes to her goals.

Right now I’m majoring in sociology, and I was gonna get just an associate’s in either applied science and look at a juvenile certificate with it for the OYA or the Youth Authority or I may transfer and go on, ...if I’m gonna try and implement my ideas I will need to go on to get a better degree

Participant Summary

Sharon felt that she gained a lot from the mentoring training and the experience. She talked about setting boundaries and the understanding that everyone has their own process. For her the mentoring experience had brought her closer to other women on campus. Her academic goals have shifted slightly and her future may move toward additional education.

Suzanne

Profile

Suzanne is 35 years old, Caucasian, and divorced with three children age 16 and under. She, as many of the women mentors, struggles to balance the demands of coursework and family responsibilities.
Her family moved from a coastal town to the suburbs of an urban city, and then further out when she was in high school. She quit high school. Since then she has held various jobs with the last employment being five years as a flagger, which she describes as a dangerous job.

She stated she “went through years of addiction, being a mother and a parent, to losing everything and going through some legal battles, criminal.” Now in recovery, she has five years clean and sober.

A first-generation college student, she started attending classes at the community college fall term 2001. After completing two terms she was introduced to the Returning Women’s Program by Deborah from the Women’s Resource Center who was the instructor for one of her psychology classes. Suzanne participated in the Returning Women’s Program during spring term 2002.

At the time of our first interview she had completed 85 credits and was taking 12 hours during the fall term 2004. She was also volunteering at a local hospital that has a large clientele of Russian immigrant families.

Her academic goal is to complete a bachelor’s in psychology and from there go into counseling psychology. She continues to take Russian classes in addition to the other required courses. She has one more year at the community college and then will do co-enrollment with a local state university.

She has been accepted for work study in the Women’s Resource Center for next year and will be part of their leadership team.


*Interviews*

Suzanne and I met for the projected three interview meetings with our first meeting taking place at the end of October. All three of the interviews took place on campus in a private conference room. She was not matched with a mentee until the end of February 2005, with the actual meetings starting in March 2005. While not extremely active, this match did last to the end of the academic year. She stated she was disappointed with being matched late.

At the first interview, held in October 2005, we discussed what she anticipated the mentoring experience would be like and what mentors she had in her life. We also talked about her experiences that led up to her entering the community college and the Returning Women’s Program.

In discussing coming back to school she shared the following information about her past employment and what it felt like to start at the community college:

I was a flagger for awhile until I realized that was such a horrible job. You know. A horrible job. Very dangerous. I decided I didn’t want to do that and I applied for I don’t know how many different jobs. Even jobs that were beyond my skill level and ah and hitting the door repeatedly, and decided to go back to school and start over.

...exciting, I was lost, and scared. I had just gotten through a bad relationship, so I was doing the single mom, on my own..... I don’t know. It was really degrading. Awful.

She described her experience with the Returning Women’s Program as positive for her “I needed it, definitely. I liked..... it a lot. I grew a lot from that.”
Suzanne’s mentors include her grandparents, an aunt, and two staff at the Women’s Resource Center. Following are her words:

I guess, my first... mentors that I remember, would be my grandparents, cause I grew up in a very rough environment with my mom. And so, I remember my grandparents being like angels from heaven. And then after that was probably my aunt was when I was heavy in my addiction. She seemed to kinda pull me out, but then she died of cancer so that was gone.

...And now its Deborah and... from the Women’s Center. Debbie is wonderful at it, she can be, she can sit.... One of the women the other day said, Deborah would be a perfect judge, because she is so, she just doesn’t fall into anything emotional when she is talking to you. Yeah she feels it but she can so see the situation so much clearer, as most people can when they’re not in it, but they have been able to help guide me through my walk through XXX basically. And any barriers that I have, that I come across in my life. They have been such a help to me with some of the major stuff, and just being a friend and listening. Deborah especially, she can sit there and just take it all in and you just feel like you’ve just gone through a therapy session. And you can sit there, and she can sit there and not say anything and I have completely figured out the situation without her saying a darn word almost.

In response to the question “When you think about being a mentor, what do you think that experience will be like for you?” Suzanne stated the following:. 

...with everything I have been put through, that I have gone through in my life, I know that there is someone out there that can use that. You know. It has all been for a reason. Whether I know what that reason is, or whether someone else knows what that reason is - or whether I know that they know what that reason is. I hope I will be able to help someone out in some way. Even if it is just to be there.

I just have real need to help people. I guess, that is my high now. Helping people feel good.
During the second interview which took place in early May 2005, we discussed what it was like for her, the experience being a mentor.

My mentee is, she's an older woman, older than me I think. She knows where she wants to go. She's sort of like I was, she knows what she wants to do. She is just unsure of how to get around the college life, the college itself. So she just needed to know, she had certain questions about the tutors and she was misinformed about a few things. She didn't really think that she could get financial aid for the summer. She thought that the school didn't provide that for any of the students.

I think she was pretty uptight at first cuz she sat like this the whole time, with her arms crossed and away from me. And I was forward, like this, engaged. She was like this until the very end. And then she was kind of relaxed. We talked for a couple of hours, well probably an hour, maybe an hour, hour and 15 minutes or so. I'm not sure what she thought. She wants to meet again so that's fine. I'm assuming that you know she thought it was okay, I hope.

Just, … she didn't know where the math tutor was, no the writing tutor; she didn't know where the writing tutor was and had made several attempts and failed that and I helped her figure that out. …told her I'd give her my three years of school experience and not to let that stuff slide and to go take care of it right away and you know.

She's taking care of her grandson and she wanted to know ...what I thought about her being successful - with taking care of her grandson and her older parents. And I explained to her I have three kids and I have been in school for three years, three plus years and it can be done. You can do it. There are resources to help you.

We talked about her writing class... She is in Writing 115 and I've already passed that and she wanted to know who a good writing teacher was cuz she didn't have a good writing teacher. So she asked me a little bit about my classes and what kind of essays I had to write and the differences between them.
Suzanne shared the following insights to what it was like for her to be a mentor, with her mentee.

...well I'd been waiting so long to get a mentee and I talked to so many people about it, I guess in my mind, it was going to be this more glorified thing where I, I expected, I don't know why, but I probably expected somebody younger and maybe somebody that just really didn't know anything. But she knew quite a bit and didn't need as much help as what I thought. I mean, I probably helped her out a lot, but it wasn't the help that I was thinking I was going to be giving her, I don't know.

The third interview was held at the campus library in late May 2005 and was for reflecting back on the experience, "What was the experience like for you, to serve as a mentor for another student?" Suzanne talked about how the experience had been for her.

Well I didn't think I'd get a returning student. I just assumed that, well I didn't really even assume, I just really never thought that I'd get a returning student cuz that's the difference. I thought I'd get somebody that didn't know anything about school.

Um, I thought I'd be able to fill their heads with all kinds of wonderful new information and help them leap over those boundaries that I, you know hit head on when I first started school so to save somebody that kind of time and frustration would be really cool.

I liked being able to share my knowledge of the school and how to maneuver through, which we only had three visits, so it was pretty short...

I was a little anxious I guess you could say to get a mentee... I stayed connected with the Women’s Resource Center throughout so I constantly was bugging them with “did I get a mentee, did I get a mentee?” I don’t think it affected my school any.
When asked what it means to her when she thinks of the word mentor, she provided the following reply:

Someone that can guide and share their experiences with somebody who has the same interests. Supportive. Nonjudgmental. A guidance counselor so to speak, a guidance person, not necessarily a counselor, but somebody that can guide.

In closing, we talked about her academic and career goals. I asked if there had been any changes over the past academic year, since our first interview in October. She provided the following response:

No, at least I don’t think they have since last year. Two associate degrees and an Oregon transfer for an associate of science. And then a Business Management Certificate and I’m also taking Russian. I’m going to transfer to… for a bachelor of psychology and then from there go to counseling psychology.

Participant Summary

Suzanne provided her mentee with useful information on how to access resources on the campus. The interactions that she had with her mentee were not as personally rewarding as she envisioned they would be for her. She expressed disappointment at not being matched sooner in the year. She felt that she had learned useful information from the mentor training she received.

Summary

The women student mentors who were matched earlier in the year viewed their experience of mentoring in a more positive manner. The women generally assumed that their mentee would be in more need of guidance than proved to be the
case. Several of the mentors discussed being a sounding board (or sound board), with listening being more of the activity than the giving of advice. When advice was requested by the mentees it was often for specific information on how to access college resources and information on courses and instructors. All mentors expressed that the experience had been meaningful for them and that they had learned from the process and from the mentor training that they participated in as a requirement of the program. The themes that emerged from the interviews are discussed in length in the next chapter.

I was humbled by the willingness of the women to open up and share their life experiences with me, the good and the bad, the accomplishments and painful past experiences. They shared their frustration when the mentoring relationship did not turn out as they had hoped and yet found ways to personalize the knowledge they had gained from serving as a mentor or taking the mentor training. All of the women spoke of the support they received from each other, from other women who have been part of the Returning Women’s Program, from the staff at the Women’s Resource Center, and from the general power of relationships between women. I stepped into the forefront of the experience as a researcher and as a woman, and felt a strong connection to their experience and grew myself from the experience.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THEMES

This chapter presents six theme clusters that emerged from the interviews with the six women student mentors who participated in this study. The women who took part in this study served as mentors for other women students during the 2004–2005 academic year at a West Coast community college. These six women shared some basic attributes. All were offered the opportunity to be a part of the mentoring program because their career goal was to work in one of the helping professions such as nursing, counseling, and social services. They had good academic standing and they showed leadership potential. All six women completed a two-day mentor training that covered program design, program expectations, confidentiality, communication, boundaries, what a mentor is and is not, and campus resources.

The six themes that emerged from the interviews were: 1) reflecting on past experience; 2) wanting to help; 3) setting and maintaining boundaries; 4) experiencing strong emotions; 5) relational support from other women; and 6) mentoring as a reciprocal relationship.
Results from Participant Interviews

The guiding question for this study was: What is the lived experience of women students who serve as mentors to other women students? The following information provides a deeper understanding of that experience and also addresses the two sub-question areas: 1) What issues do women students who mentor encounter in the mentor experience? and 2) How do women students who mentor believe that they have or have not benefited from the mentoring experience?

The six theme clusters and their corresponding sub-themes are listed below. Following the list is a brief description and in-depth look at each of the clusters.

1. Reflecting on past experiences
   - Feeling intimidated and overwhelmed
   - Others have knowledge/secret society
   - Not having personal power

2. Wanting to help
   - Desire to give back
   - Help remove or avoid barriers

3. Setting and maintaining boundaries
   - Personal boundaries
   - School/professional boundaries
   - Concern to do no harm
4. Experiencing strong emotions
   - Anticipation
   - Anxiety
   - Frustration and disappointment

5. Relational support from other women
   - Women’s Resource Center, as a foundation for change
   - Development of alumni group
   - Group support

6. Mentoring as a reciprocal relationship
   - Learning from each other
   - Reaffirmation of self

**Reflecting on Past Experience**

The experience of preparing to serve as a mentor and actively mentoring brought back memories for them of what they had experienced when they decided to attend or return to college and when they first entered the Returning Women’s Program. All of the mentors spoke about challenges they faced when they were new to the community college. This experience of reflection is underscored in the literature relating to mentoring and is a common experience for mentors.
Zachary (2000) states that:

Mentors who become students of their own experience use reflection to inform what they do and how they do it. In reflecting on their experiences, they learn something about themselves, and as a result are better prepared to facilitate effective learning relationships. (preface)

The participants spoke of several common experiences when reflecting back on their entry to the community college. First, they spoke of a feeling of being intimidated and/or overwhelmed by the process. They were concerned that others would think they were dumb, stupid, or incapable - not up to the task. Second, for most mentors, was a related feeling of being excluded, of not having all the information and not belonging to the group. There was a sense that a set of information on how to succeed was shared by others, but they did not have access to it and did not know how to go about getting access. Third, they shared a general feeling of not having personal power in the past, that others were in control of their life choices (parents, husband, employers, etc.) and that they could only react to the circumstances presented to them.

*Feeling Intimidated and Overwhelmed*

All six mentors spoke about how difficult it was to follow-up on their decision to enter the community college because they were intimated by the admissions process and/or overwhelmed by beginning this new experience. There were also concerns of appearing less knowledgeable than others and a concern that others would view them as less competent. Sharon described her first experience
of going to a college admissions office and returning home with paperwork she was expected to complete. Not knowing how to do that, it took her three months before she returned. Karen stated, “I was afraid people wouldn’t like me....if I didn’t talk right for somebody”. Suzanne shared her feelings saying, “I was lost, and scared... I was a single mom on my own.” Linda sums up the experience:

We all said when we’ve gotten to the Returning Women’s Program, “I feel dumb.” You don’t want to say it out loud, but you come to the college and go, “I’m lost, I’m really lost, oh god, am I lost.” And not wanting to say it, and ... thinking everybody is smarter than you.

Others Having Knowledge/Secret Society

There was an underlying theme for three of the women of others having knowledge that they did not have about the process needed to be successful in college. They felt on the outside, looking in at almost a “secret society” that they were not a part of, that they were excluded from, and did not know how to access.

Karen talked about this feeling of exclusion being related even to the reentry program for women. Initially, she thought that the program was only for a select group -- a group to which she did not belong. She said, “The Returning Women’s Program seemed like it was just for the elite women, women that knew where they were going.”

This feeling of being excluded and not belonging related to the college experience and to the workforce. Linda spoke about not having paid employment and her homemaker, parenting, and volunteer work not being seen as of value to potential employers. Sharon underscored this feeling when relaying what she hoped to give
to her mentee “to have somebody they can ask questions to, that’s not going to make them feel like they’re stupid for asking. Because when you’re kicked back out into the college campus life, and, and trying to adjust and get along, you feel like you almost should know these things, but you don’t.”

**Wanting to Help**

The participants stated an underlying desire to help other students avoid the frustration that can come with being new to college life and to balance home, work, and academic achievement. They felt that by sharing the knowledge they had gained during their college experience they could help others avoid potential barriers to academic success and difficulties with the college system. The experience of giving back and helping others reaffirmed the participants’ view of themselves as successful in their role as college students and uplifted their confidence in their own abilities.

**Desire to Give Back**

All six mentors stated that they were motivated to become mentors because of a desire to help the women students entering the Returning Women’s Program. The literature review supports the premise that individuals often decide to volunteer as mentors out of a desire to give back to others the assistance they received and to share their own experiences. Cheryl shared, “I was really stoked in the class, yeah, I get to help somebody.” For Karen there was excitement and a bit of nervousness tied to her desire to give back. She stated “I hope I’m as informative, and gentle,
like my mentors were." Suzanne felt that she could share her experience to help others. She commented, “with everything I have gone through in my life, I know that there is someone out there that can use that. It has all been for a reason… I hope I will be able to help someone out in some way, even if it is just to be there.”

**Help Remove or Avoid Barriers**

A sub-theme of wanting to help by removing barriers or showing the mentee how to avoid barriers was also shared by all of the mentors. Karen and Suzanne discussed with their mentees which teachers they felt provided the best learning environment and which academic advisors provided clear, accurate, and useful information. Karen stated Sharon and Linda provided information and advice to their mentees on registering for classes, accessing tutors, and figuring out schedules. Sharon stated “I just want to be able to be there and to help the, and give them resources that they need… give them a little guidance to help them take the next step. Mari and Linda talked about the women who they informally mentor and the help the women need with figuring out registration and how to access support services.

**Setting and Maintaining Boundaries**

The purpose for boundaries is to protect and take care of ourselves. Having boundaries clarified in a mentoring relationship serves two purposes. First, it provides a framework for the mentoring relationship. Second, it provides the mentor with guidance on how much is reasonable to expect to give.
**Personal and Professional Boundaries**

Setting and maintaining boundaries both on a personal and professional level was mentioned by all six mentors. Linda stated that she “goes back to the mentor training materials related to boundaries” when she is uncertain of how much to become involved. Mari said that the information on boundaries was important because she “did not have any” in her personal experiences. Karen discussed how she works to keep her personal challenges out of the mentoring relationship and to keep her personal boundaries in the relationships. She shared how she serves as a sounding board for her mentee but “I have my own sound board.”

Questions that arose for the mentors ranged from how much, if any, personal information to give out, to asking the Women’s Resource Center staff in what instances could they refer the mentee there for assistance.

It is not surprising that boundaries came up often with the women mentors. Setting personal and professional boundaries is difficult for the seasoned professional and even more so for volunteers and paraprofessionals. Due to the importance of this topic, it was one of the topics covered in the two-day mentoring seminar that all mentors were required to attend. Setting boundaries is often discussed/written about in the helping professions and in literature on mentoring. The California Community College mentoring training curriculum for students serving as mentors to youth in foster care includes a section on boundaries, as do many other college handbooks for student mentors.
The mentoring program coordinator offered this insight into the extent that boundaries had been an issue for the study participants:

The major theme that arose throughout the whole, from the beginning, and throughout the year was boundaries. Boundaries of what is my role, how much am I responsible for the other person. If I take on this mentoring role, if the mentee doesn’t succeed, how much am I responsible. Professional boundaries and personal boundaries, really struggling with that. Wanting to know if they’re doing enough, or too much. How much time do I give? What if I don’t know something? Fear of being responsible for this person’s life almost. So really learning to bring it into perspective; that they were offering a certain amount of support, and that’s it, they’re not totally responsible for that person. And typical professional boundaries like should I give my phone number out or do I talk about my personal life, those kinds of things. And we went over that in class and then that came up, the detailed kind of boundaries come up in the early phase.

**Desire to Do No Harm**

Mentors stated concern with ensuring that they were giving out accurate information and sound advice. The mentoring program coordinator verified that most of the mentors had checked in with her regarding the level of advice and guidance they were providing to the mentees. The mentors also were cognizant of the need to know when to refer their mentee to another person either if they did not have the information needed or the mentee needed counseling or guidance beyond the scope of the mentoring role. Karen stated “I am confident enough to say I don’t know that and I need to give you a name of someone that might answer that.” Five of the mentors spoke about learning how to listen in a nonjudgmental way and the importance of “being there fully for the mentee.” Four of the six mentors also
discussed referring their mentee, or student they were informally mentoring, to the
counselor at the Women’s Resource Center.

**Experiencing Strong Emotions**

There were several strong emotions that were experienced by the 
participants in this study. When waiting for the mentor-mentee relationship to
begin the participants were in a state of anticipation, a waiting for the experience to
commence. For some this anticipation moved into frustration and disappointment
when their relationship with the mentee was not realized. There was also anxiety
around what to expect in the relationship and in projecting if they would be able to
meet the needs of the mentee.

The occurrence of experiencing strong emotions was not a topic covered in
the literature on mentoring. Yet for this group of women, it was a key component to
their experience of becoming mentors. The level of anxiety and frustration were, at
times, intense.

*Anticipation*

All of the mentors spoke of their anticipation of what the mentor-mentee
relationship would be like for them and their hopes for the mentoring relationship.
In the first interview with the mentors they were specially asked to describe what
they envisioned the experience of serving as a mentor would be like for them. The
feeling of anticipation was especially underscored for the three mentors who were
not matched with a mentee until winter term 2005. These mentors checked in often
with the mentoring program coordinator to find out if they had been assigned a
mentee and if they would be matched with a mentee from the next Returning
Women Program class.

Suzanne shared that “I have this real need to help people.” Karen stated, “I
hope I’m as informative and gentle, like my mentors were.” Cheryl commented
“I’m really excited to get started. I want a mentee. I’m ready to be a mentor.”
Linda, who has had previous experience as a mentor, stated her commitment to
serve as a mentor and was especially concerned when she was not initially paired
with mentee.

**Anxiety**

Anxiety is a natural response to the unknown. It is a subjective experience
of discomfort (Stratton & Hayes, 1989). For the mentors the concern of how to
deal with the barriers that came up with their mentees and adjusting to their role as
a mentor produced anxiety. Not knowing what the experience would be like and the
concern whether they would be able to support the mentees in all of the areas that
might be needed was stressful. Once they discovered that the primary functions
were listening, validating the experiences, and helping walk the mentee through
such activities as signing up for class or learning how to use the career center, the
anxiety for the mentors subsided. Suzanne, initially surprised and somewhat
concerned about being paired with mentee who is an older student with a
bachelor’s degree, moved forward with the relationship and provided guidance to
her mentee on campus resources and balancing work and home life. Karen worked
through an awkward period when her mentee did not return phone calls to continue on with her mentee providing emotional support, advice, and listening. All of the mentors stated they were anxious when waiting to hear if they had been assigned a mentee.

**Frustration and Disappointment**

Frustration was experienced in the wait to “have a mentee” and frustration with assigned mentees who did not follow through with scheduled meetings. Linda and Cheryl described the disappointment and frustration that they felt when their assigned mentee was not responsive and did not keep appointments or return phone calls. Cheryl stated “I called and called...no response, she kinda gave me the run around. I was a little disappointed but it’s not worth chasing.” Similarly, Man shared concern that her assigned mentee was delaying entering college and had ended the mentoring relationships. Man commented “it’s not what I expected, my mentee decided not to come to school. She had all these hopes, she’s being dragged back...” Linda shared that her experience was “frustrating” and “time consuming”.

Sharon spoke to another level of frustration: “I see a lot of women suffering, with a lot of the same things. They’re kind of stuck. I see so much potential in people and they’re not really understanding how to access it.”

**Relational Support from Other Women**

All of the women who were participants in this study entered the college via the Returning Women’s Program, which is a component of the Women’s Resource
Center. They shared stories of support that they had received from the Center’s staff and in particular, Deborah who serves as the staff counselor and the coordinator of the new mentoring program. The graduates of the Returning Women’s Program have a special bond and frequent the Center’s office to have coffee, chat, and to use the computer or telephone available for students. The Center also has a leadership team that is available on a regular basis to help students navigate the college system and to provide peer support. A member of the leadership team, also a mentor participating in this study, formed a Returning Women’s Program alumni group. The alumni group meets on a regular basis at the Center.

Women’s Resource Center as Foundation for Change

Four of the mentors spoke of the foundation that the Women’s Resource Center and the Returning Women’s Program had brought to their experience of being a college student. Key to this in several cases was the support provided by the Center’s staff, in particular the program’s counselor. Sharon stated “this Women’s Resource Center is probably the best thing they have on campus... you can come in, relax, have a cup of coffee; it’s an outlet here just to be comfortable.” Mari credits the Center and the Returning Women’s Program with being able to assert herself. She commented “the women there are incredible.” Linda speaks of the staff as mentors and credits them with helping her move on with her life after being a displaced homemaker. Suzanne points to the calm presence of the program’s counselor and the support she has received from the staff of the
Women's Resource Center as one of the reasons she has been successful at the college.

This experience of support from the program echoes the experience of support in other similar programs. McMurry (1996) in her study Participation in Adult Learning: Case Histories of Community College Women, noted:

Some women mentioned the influence of support of both on and off campus counselors. Some mentioned particular instructors who had been supportive, or past teachers who were inspirational when they were young. Many mentioned the emotional support they received from the displaced homemaker/single parent program as well as the financial support, some clearly citing program staff, some mentioning classmates they had kept in touch with. One says the program staff "are like her family. (p. 132)

Development of an Alumni Group

Mari, who is also a student leader with the Women's Resource Center, developed an alumni group during the fall of 2004. This is a place where women who have graduated from the Returning Women's Program could get together, have coffee, and share experiences once a month. This ongoing support for the women graduates provided a continuation of the cohort experience that had initially provided support to their entry into the community college system. Not only was this group important to the mentors, it provided a place and time to touch base and to stay connected with other women on a regular basis. Four of the women mentors noted that this alumni group, and other gathering of graduates, continues to provide them a safe and comfortable place within the college environment.
**Group Support**

For four of the women, the support received from fellow mentors was important. They had shared common experiences in the mentor training and the process of being paired with mentees. This interaction forged a bond between the women, and their relationships expanded into new areas including supporting each other academically and emotionally.

**Mentoring as a Reciprocal Relationship**

Daloz (1999) describes mentoring as a journey that is transformational for both the mentor and the person being mentored. This premise is further supported by Vivian Mott (2002), who states, “Mentoring relationships hold great mutual promise for adults – whether as mentors or protégés – in terms of understanding and negotiating life’s challenging developmental processes, while promoting friendship, assurance, career advancement, rejuvenation, and transformation” (p.13).

All four participants in this study who met with their mentee spoke of receiving benefits from the relationship and learning from their mentee. There was also a sense that the relationship changed each party in the mentoring relationship and that each person grew from that experience. Karen stated the mentoring experience was “just people meeting people, talking about “Where I’ve been, where they’ve been, where she’s been. She can help me there.”
Learning from Each Other

The two of the three mentors who were in mentor-mentee relationships that continued to the end of the academic year shared stories of learning from their mentee just as their mentee was learning from them. Sharon noted that the relationship was benefiting both herself and her mentee. She stated, “At least at this point in the game, it not always clear who’s mentoring who, is what it comes down to.” Karen talked about how at times something brought up by her mentee provides her with new knowledge or an insight. She said, “Her conversation can trigger something in my brain. Wow, I never thought of it that way.”

Reaffirmation of Self

By helping through giving back, the mentors reaffirmed their belief in themselves, a sense that they rose to the occasion, that they “did that.” They had moved through the initial stage of anxiety and fear of the unknown. They had become comfortable and successful in their role as students. Deborah, the mentoring program coordinator, described this as a reflective look by the mentors to their past when they were beginning students and now using that experience to help the mentees move through their process. Her comment on experience for the mentors:

As we’re watching that other person, we’re reminded of actually how hard it was. It’s almost a newfound validation for, “I have really accomplished a lot.” Just by being able to be a support for somebody else …gives validation to their life experience and their … achievement in school.
The mentors felt validated by their selection into the mentoring program and gained confidence in their interactions with the mentee. The experience of completing mentor training, being matched with a mentee, and the group support from other mentors elevated their view of themselves as comfortable and capable individuals. Karen commented that “I felt knowledgeable, an authority, I felt confident.” Linda stated that “I have a lot to offer, to give to other students. I share information on registration, scheduling, and class load balance.” Cheryl commented that even though it did not work out with her assigned mentee, she was using the skills learned to mentor friends and family members and practicing nonjudgmental communication and listening.

**Summary**

The question guiding inquiry for this study is “What is the lived experience of women students who serve as mentors to other women students?” A qualitative approach was used to design this study to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of women student mentors. The study was carried out in the phenomenological tradition and involved multiple interviews with each participant to gain an understanding of their experience. The data analysis included substantial period of immersion in the data and reflection on the meaning. The six emergent themes resulted after reviewing the original transcriptions, reductions of the
interview transcripts, review and re-review of notes of themes and sub-themes and periods of reflection at each stage.

The themes identified provide us with a deeper understanding of the lived experience of women student mentors on one college campus. This chapter of the study also provided us with information on the issues that women student mentors encounter in the experience of mentoring.
CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter includes the personal reflections of the researcher, areas of significance, recommendations for future research, and recommendations for future practice for community colleges.

Reflective Summary

I was struck by the high level of desire to give back to others that was exhibited by the women mentors who participated in this study. I had not anticipated the intensity of that desire or the level of concern for doing no harm. In my reflections on the experience, I have come to believe that the mentors' depth of concern for others comes in part from the many challenges they have faced and overcome in their own lives. These women have succeeded in the face of adversity. They share the experience of the Returning Women's Program that is both nurturing and empowering and three called it their foundational base. One mentor called it her savior. They are resilient and strong, and they have taken to heart their decision to succeed in college and they are going to succeed.

My presence in this research was part of the experience and my presence, along with the presence of the mentoring program coordinator impacted the experience for the mentors. The mentors express concern to the mentoring program coordinator about "not letting us down." They voiced a concern about the impact to
the mentoring program and this research, should the mentor-mentee match not work out. There was also an awareness of our bond as students and spoke in our interviews about pressure during mid-terms and finals and when there were papers to write. Knowledge and experience with graduate work, qualitative research, and writing a dissertation were new to the mentors. I found myself in the role of an informal mentor, which I had not anticipated. Their interest in the research process was genuine and their reaction to the work warm and welcoming. The mentoring program coordinator commented on this aspect:

They feel a bond with you. They feel that the work that you are doing is their work, in terms of you doing it for all women. Just to be able to look up to you and get to know you informally, allows them to imagine themselves in your shoes.

My choice of phenomenology as the research tradition, with the interviews occurring over a nine month period, provided the depth of experience that I was seeking when designing this study. Qualitative method is in sync with how I experience the world and construct knowledge. Emersion in the data, followed by reflection, provided considerable time and opportunity for distilling the experience into themes. The review of the literature on mentoring and women’s way of knowing brought additional personal gratification during this study.

The theme of experiencing strong emotions and the intensity of the experience by the mentors emerged from the data entirely. The theme was not found in the literature reviewed for this study. Related themes of transformation change and mentoring as a reciprocal relationship (Daloz, 1999) are present in the
literature. The finding of "experiencing strong emotions" should be noted when developing mentoring programs and support provided to the mentors to address that experience. It is clear that to have a successful program attention to who mentors the mentor is very important.

The findings from this research study cannot be generalized to a range of mentoring programs that occur on college campuses. The study looked only at women student mentors who had participated in a Returning Women's Program on one community college campus. Additionally, all six women were pursuing coursework to prepare them for work in some type of helping profession. With the mentoring program in its first year of operation, the coordinator of that program was frank in her assessment of changes needed in the program, including increased group meetings and ongoing training for the women mentors.

The success of the mentor-mentee matches in this voluntary program was also limited by the number of women entering the program who were interested in having a mentor and the number of women who were willing to volunteer their time as mentors. The length of the mentoring experience was short, with eight months being the maximum amount of time that a mentor-mentee pair interacted. Only three of the six mentor-mentee pairs continued to the end of the academic year. Two of the pairs never met, and one pair met three times over a two-month period.

The women who enter the community college via the Returning Women's Program have a combination of life experiences that significantly impact whether
they will continue on with college classes. Such factors include, but are not limited to, being in recovery from addictions, lack of personal financial resources, children to care for, being first-generation college students, and being in transition as displaced homemakers. The women who enter the college via the Returning Women’s Program are historically older students, women in their 30s–50s. The positive aspect of this is that they have substantial life experience to draw on when serving as a mentor. Additionally, the mentors selected were individuals who were comfortable reaching out to others to provide assistance and who have had at least three terms of academic success.

**Significant Factors Identified**

There were two significant factors, outside of the emergent themes, that need to be considered when viewing this research for content for the purpose of designing or implementing new mentoring programs.

**Mentoring and Nontraditional Students**

This study provides information on strengthening mentoring programs for nontraditional student populations and provides insights regarding the impact of the experience on the student mentor. It also provides caution on ensuring that the design of programs includes availability of qualified staff to address the emotional needs of the mentors as they sort through the anxiety and frustration that came with the role of helping other students. The mentors themselves had numerous personal issues beyond academic achievement that they were dealing with during the time
period that they were serving as mentors and were in need of support systems to
address their own needs while they were serving as a support system for other
women.

*Developing a Program to Serve Others*

The mentors who participated in this study were very willing to step
forward and assist with the implementation of a new program and the development
of process to serve other women students. They saw their role beyond that of
mentors. They provided leadership for a new effort and provided feedback via this
research and via direct interaction with the Returning Women’s Program, on what
was working and not working in the mentoring program and for themselves as
mentors. They also felt that the training provided for mentors was of value to their
personal life experiences. One mentor stated that such training should be
incorporated for all returning women students, especially the training on setting and
maintaining boundaries.

*Recommendations for Future Research*

The following research areas regarding peer mentoring programs in
academic settings should be conducted. Such research will continue the
examination of experience of student mentors, the impact of the experience on
student retention, and the systemwide approach to the provision of mentoring
services.
Women as Student Mentors

Additional studies should be conducted to develop a greater understanding of the experience of women students who serve as mentors in two- and four-year colleges. This study explored the experience of women mentors in a returning women’s program. Adding studies that address the experience of mentors in a variety of other programs on campus would provide a broader understanding of the experience of women student mentors.

Men as Student Mentors

Studies focusing on the experience of male students who serve as mentors to other students in community college settings would add to the literature in an area where there is currently little information available.

Comparison of the Experiences of Male and Female Mentors

Studies that look at the experience of both male and female student mentors would provide an opportunity to compare and contrast their experiences. This would help inform the development of both general and specific training and support programs for student mentors.

Retention Studies on Students Who Serve as Mentors

Longitudinal studies to track the retention of students who mentor other students and their accomplishment of stated academic goals, compared to students who did not mentor, would bring insight about the impact of the mentoring experience on academic achievement.
College Credit and Training

There is a need for quantitative research in the area of academic incentives offered to students who serve as student mentors. Developing a listing of regional or national practices that support the mentoring experience with college credit for required training, mentoring service, or related coursework and tracking the success of such efforts would be beneficial in the design of new programs. Related areas of research could include documentation of community placements/internships, service learning and AmeriCorps programs, and other similar programs that are utilizing college students to provide mentoring to youth in local communities and the incentives that are being provided to the students.

Mentoring Programs Across Individual College Campuses

For large campuses, particularly multi-campus colleges, it would be beneficial to study what formal mentoring programs are being implemented throughout the college and the impact of the various mentoring programs. Such studies could also addresses areas where mentoring programs are lacking and should be implemented to support exiting initiatives.

Statewide View of Mentoring Programs on Community College Campuses

Research documenting the use of mentoring programs throughout a statewide community college system is needed to identify current practices, the number and types of programs, retention impacts or anticipated impacts on mentors and mentees, and to provide information on program costs. Resulting information
would be invaluable in building a continuum of mentoring services that are informed by best practices and that build on current knowledge and resources.

**Recommendations for Practice**

One of the goals of this study is to provide information that will be of benefit to administrators and staff of community colleges that are implementing new mentoring programs and to those that want to improve existing mentoring programs. The recommendations for community colleges include: Provide training for mentors, provide ongoing support for mentors, offer an orientation for the mentees on responsibilities and expectations, design the mentoring program to provide for a full academic year commitment, provide incentives and rewards for serving as a mentor, and provide quality staffing of the program.

**Training for Mentors**

The two-day required training for the mentors was frequently referenced by the mentors as beneficial to the mentoring relationship and to their own personal growth. The information on setting and maintaining boundaries was the most often cited benefit of the training. Other aspects of the training that were noted as helpful were the guidance provided on confidentiality, discussion of what a mentor is and is not, including when to refer the mentee to a counselor or back to the women’s center for assistance, and a review of resources available on the campus and their location.
Community colleges should obtain examples of training outlines or course syllabi from other colleges to assist them in the design of their mentor training. The mentors should receive college credit for completing the required training. Additionally, the college program should develop a mentor program handbook for staff, mentors, and mentees.

**Ongoing Support for Mentors**

Ongoing support for the mentors was seen as important by the mentors and the mentoring program coordinator. The mentors, in this study, utilized an emerging returning women's alumni group and interaction with fellow mentors to provide ongoing support along with one-to-one meetings with the mentoring program coordinator. Both the mentors and the program coordinator felt that a more formalized support system would enhance the experience of the mentors in this particular program.

Scheduled monthly meetings to debrief and discuss issues that have arisen in the mentoring relationship are recommended for community college mentoring programs. These meetings for the mentors need to be facilitated by a staff or faculty member who has strong background in interpersonal relationships, preferably counseling. The mentors should be required to attend at least 50 percent of the monthly meetings. Care needs to be taken to protect the confidentiality of the mentee's during the support meeting for the mentors. This can be addressed in part by not using the mentees name and by having the mentors provide the staff person
coordinating the meeting with a list of concerns or topics they would like addressed, in advance of the meeting.

**Mentee Orientation**

The results of the interviews in this study indicate that an orientation for mentees on the mentoring program that includes clarification of roles and responsibilities of the mentor and the mentee would be a helpful addition to the design of the mentoring program at the community college. This orientation should occur after the individual has indicated an interest in having a mentor.

The mentee orientation should include, at a minimum, information on the length of the commitment, role and responsibilities of the mentee and the mentor, confidentiality within the relationship, and who to contact if they have concerns about the mentoring relationship.

**Full Academic Year Commitment**

Mentoring relationships take time to develop. In an ideal world the mentoring relationship between advanced and beginning students would continue over a period of several years, allowing the relationship to grow, strengthen, and provide a deeper, richer exchange of information and support. The reality for community college students is that an advanced student may be a student who has completed three or more terms of coursework. For this research study, the mentors that were matched during fall term and continued on to the end of the academic year had a higher rate of success in continuing the relationship and the mentor stated more satisfaction with the mentoring experience. Of the mentor-mentee pairs
that were matched later in the academic year, only one out of four matches continued on to the end of the year.

For a successful mentoring program that provides value for the mentee and mentor, it is recommended that the mentoring relationship be set up to last the entire academic year. This would require that the mentors be identified during the previous summer or spring term. The required training for the mentors would also need to occur prior to the beginning of fall term. The opportunity to have a mentor would be advertised at registration or in recruitment materials including materials for returning women’s programs and other programs targeting specific populations.

Incentives and Rewards for Participation

The one-credit hour the mentors in this study received for their completion of the required mentor training was cited as academically valuable to the mentors. Additionally, they felt that it provided recognition for their effort. The provision of childcare and lunch during the two sessions, which were held on Saturdays, took into account the financial impact to the participants and showed respect for their personal circumstances and for their commitment to the program.

Literature on volunteer programs and initial studies on youth mentoring programs (Rhodes, 2002) underscore the need for providing recognition for volunteer mentors. Additionally, as mentioned previously, Goodland (1995) proposed that “reciprocity is needed to avoid exploitation of students.” College students serving as mentors should at a minimum receive public recognition for their mentoring services and also be provided with a written reference to add to
their resume. Furthermore, the provision of college credit for the required training or for the actual mentoring hours themselves should be provided. This could be as part of a series on career guidance, as in this study, as an internship, as community placement credits, or as part of sociology or psychology seminar hours combined with course instruction.

**Importance of Staffing Model**

It is essential that the mentoring program be staffed with a qualified program coordinator who has experience in working with students on personal life issues including anxiety, frustration, and boundaries. As evidenced by this study the mentors need a support system to work through the issues that arise in a mentoring relationship. Authors in the field of mentoring speak to the role of the mentor in providing guidance (Daloz 1999; Hegstad 1999; Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Mott, 2002; Mullen, 1998; Murray, 1991; Rhodes, 2002; Wadsworth, 2002; Zachary, 2000). The mentor is also at times in need of guidance, and this is especially true of individuals, such as college students, who are experiencing their own life transitions.

**Summary**

The number of mentoring programs on college campuses, especially community college campuses, has risen dramatically over the past decade. However, there has been limited research on the effectiveness of mentoring programs on community college campuses and even less research on the impact of
the mentoring experience on student mentors. This study contributes to the knowledge of the experience of women student mentors in a community college setting.

This phenomenological study recorded the lived experience of women student mentors. Additionally, the study addresses what issues the women students encountered in that experience and how they believed they benefited from the experience. The findings of the study highlight the emergent themes from the experiences of the woman student mentors and provides recommendations for community college administrators and staff, who are designing or implementing new mentoring program.
REFERENCES


Newbury Park, CA: Sage


*Dissertation Abstracts International, 56*(8), 2972.


Paper presented at the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education's Optimizing the Nation's Investment: Persistence and Success in Postsecondary Education conference, Madison, WI.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: SCRIPT FOR RECRUITING STUDENT MENTORS

My name is Vikki Rennick and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Oregon State University. As part of my degree requirement, I am engaging in a research study on the lived experience of women college students who mentor other women students in a community college setting.

I am recruiting women students who have qualified to serve as mentors with the Women’s Resource Center’s XXXXXXX Program at XXXXXXX Community College, XXXXXXX Campus for the 2004–2005 academic year as participants in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary with participation in the study limited to a maximum of six participants.

Completion of this study is vital. Community colleges are increasingly implementing student-to-student (peer) mentoring programs as part of their student retention efforts, yet they have limited information available to them regarding the impact of such programs on the students who serve as mentors. Most existing studies of college mentoring programs focus on faculty or staff mentoring students or on the experience of the mentee (student being mentored). The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experience of women students who mentor other women students in a community college setting. This study is expected to reveal patterns, themes, and insights into the experience of the women students who chose to serve as mentors to other women students. The results of this research will be published as a doctoral dissertation and may be used for publication and presentations.

Participation in this study requires a commitment of nine to ten months (September–June). During this time you would be interviewed on three occasions. Each of the three interviews covers a different facet of the research. The first interview will be conducted prior to your regular meetings with your mentee—the student you are mentoring (September – October 2004). The second interview will discuss your experience of mentoring other women students (February – March). The final interview will be a reflection of the mentoring experience during the past academic year (April – May 2005). Each of the three interviews will be 60 to 90 minutes in length.

The interview questions will be open ended, exploring personal meaning and relevance. The interviews will be tape recorded. Transcription of the audiotapes will be done by a paid transcriptionist known to the researcher who has been providing professional transcription services for over four years.
Additionally, you will meet with me, as necessary, to review the audiotape transcripts for accuracy. The interviews will be held in a mutually agreeable place that is conducive to conversation, audiotaping of the interview, and that provides some privacy.

Prior to participating in the study, I will ask you to read and sign a consent form, complete a demographic questionnaire, and set up a tentative schedule for the first two interviews.

I will be handing out a copy of these comments and a copy of an informed consent document outlining the procedures of the research study and information about your rights and responsibilities as participants, should you elect to participate in this study.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at 503-705-5233 or email me at vikkirennick2@aol.com within the next seven days. Please take time to think about the commitment required, and the purpose of this study, before deciding to participate in this study. Thank you.
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT - STUDENT

Project Title: The Experience of Women Student Mentors
Principal Investigator: Dr. Rich Shintaku, OSU School of Education
Research Staff: Vikki Rennick, OSU Graduate Student

PURPOSE
This is a dissertation research study. The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of women community college students who serve as mentors to other women students. The study is expected to reveal patterns, themes, and insights into the experience of women students who mentor in a community college setting. The results of this study will be used to meet the requirements of a doctoral program at Oregon State University, School of Education, and Community College Leadership Program. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to participate in this study or not. This process is called "informed consent." You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study as you have been selected by the Women's Resource Center staff to serve as a mentor with the XXXXXX Mentoring Program at XXXXXX Community College -- XXXXXX Campus for the 2004-2005 academic year. It is anticipated that four to six students who are serving as mentors via this program will be interviewed as part of this research study.

PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate, your involvement will consist of three 60-90 minute face-to-face interviews that will occur during a nine-month period (September 15, 2004--June 15, 2005) and follow-up conversations. The follow-up conversations, via telephone, email or in person, are for checking the accuracy of the audiotape transcripts from each interview. There will be up to three to four months between each of the three interviews. As a participant in this study, your interviews will be audiotaped, unless you request that they not be. At any time, you may request that the taping be stopped. You may also request at any time to stop an interview or refuse to answer any question. At the end of this study, you will receive a copy of your audiotaped interviews and a copy of the transcripts. All other copies of your interview audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of this study.

The first interview will be conducted prior to your first meeting with your mentee (the student that you are mentoring). The second interview will occur after you have been meeting with your mentee for a few months. The final of the three interviews will take place toward the end of the academic year.
RISKS
The researcher foresees no risks, except for a slight risk to the mentor/mentee relationship as a result of the study. It is possible that a mentee might be uncomfortable with the mentor describing one of their meetings. Participants will be voluntarily participating in the study and will have the ability to end their participation in the study at any time. Participation or non-participation in this project will have no effect on the individual’s relationship with XXXXXXX Mentoring Program, XXXXXXX Community College (XXX), or with your academic standing.

BENEFITS
There will be no direct benefits for participating in this study. However, the researcher anticipates that, in the future, society may benefit from this study by community colleges having a clearer understanding of the mentoring experience. Additionally, XXXXXXX Community College – XXXXXXX Campus may use this study to improve their mentoring program and their understanding of the impact of the mentoring experience. At the end of the study you will be provided with copies of the audiotape transcripts from each of your three interviews with the researcher, which you may value for personal reasons.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION
You will not have any costs other than your time to get to and participate in the interviews. You will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

ANONYMITY OR CONFIDENTIALITY
Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

AUDIO RECORDING
By initialing in the space provided, you verify that you have been told that audio recordings will be generated during the course of this study. A pseudonym will be assigned to you and all information obtained from you or related to you will be associated with that pseudonym. Your identity will be known only to Vikki Rennick, researcher, and Dr. Rich Shintaku, principal investigator. All audiotapes will be transcribed by Vikki Rennick or by a paid transcriptionist. All written and recorded information, including interview notes, gathered during this study will be kept on a secure computer, in a locked file cabinet, or safety deposit box by the researcher. All
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT - STUDENT, Continued

copies of the audiotapes will be destroyed. Transcripts of the audiotapes will be kept for a minimum of three years by the researcher in a secure location.

_________ Participant’s initials

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time without repercussions. Additionally, you may decline to answer any question during the interviews that you prefer not to answer. If you withdraw from the study, information you have provided will be destroyed and not included in the final report.

QUESTIONS
Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Vikki Rennick at 503-705-5233 or by email at vikkirennick2@aol.com or Dr. Rich Shintaku, at 541-737-9324 or by email at rich.shintaku@oregonstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

__________________________
(Signature of Participant)    (Date)

RESEARCHER STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the participant or, where appropriate, with the participant’s legally authorized representative, using a translator when necessary. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

__________________________
(Signature of Researcher)    (Date)
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT - PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Project Title: The Experience of Women Student Mentors
Principal Investigator: Dr. Rich Shintaku, School of Education
Research Staff: Vikki Rennick, OSU Graduate Student

PURPOSE
This is a dissertation research study. The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of women community college students who serve as mentors to other women students. The study is expected to reveal patterns, themes, and insights into the experience of women students who mentor in a community college setting. The results of this study will be used to meet the requirements of a doctoral program at Oregon State University, School of Education, and Community College Leadership Program. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to participate in this study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study as you serve as the coordinator for the XXXXXX Mentoring Program at XXXXXX Community College – XXXXXXX Campus.

PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate, your involvement will consist of one or two 30 - 60 minute face-to-face interview(s) that will occur during a two month period (June–July 2005) and follow-up conversations. The follow-up conversations, via telephone, email or in person, are for checking the accuracy of the audiotape transcripts from each interview. The interviews will be audiotaped, unless you request that they not be. At any time, you may request that the taping be stopped. You may also request at any time to stop an interview or refuse to answer any questions. All copies of your interview audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of this study.

The interview(s) will focus on your perceptions of the patterns and themes that arose from your conversations and interactions with the women student mentors who were participants in the XXXXXX Mentoring Program during the 2004-2005 academic year. This information will be used in the study for triangulation purposes.
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT - PROGRAM COORDINATOR, Continued

(to support, contradict, or expand on themes and patterns identified by the researcher).

**RISKS**
The researcher foresees no risks to participating in this research study, including any risks in terms of your relationship with your mentor students and/or with the mentoring program. Participants will be voluntarily participating in the study and will have the ability to end their participation in the study at any time. Participation or non-participation in this project will have no effect on your relationship with XXXXXX Mentoring Program or XXXXXX Community College (XXX).

**BENEFITS**
There will be no direct benefits for participating in this study. However, the researcher anticipates that, in the future, society may benefit from this study by community colleges having a clearer understanding of the mentoring experience. Additionally, XXXXXXX Community College – XXXXXX Campus may use this study to improve their mentoring program and their understanding of the impact of the mentoring experience. At the end of the study participants will be provided with copies of the audiotape transcripts from each of their interviews, which they may value for personal reasons.

**COSTS AND COMPENSATION**
You will not have any costs other than your time to get to and participate in the interviews. You will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

**ANOMYMY OR CONFIDENTIALITY**
You will be identified as the Mentoring Program Coordinator and not by name in the research report. Additionally, the name of the college will not be used in research report. It will be referred to as a West Coast community college. The identity of the mentors participating in the study will not be revealed to you until the end of the academic year after they have completed their mentoring service. Mentors will be identified by pseudonyms in all transcripts and reports. Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you.
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT - PROGRAM COORDINATOR, Continued

AUDIO RECORDING
By initialing in the space provided, you verify that you have been told that audio recordings will be generated during the course of this study. A pseudonym will be assigned to you and all information obtained from you or related to you will be associated with that pseudonym. Your identity will be known only to Vikki Rennick, researcher, and Rich Shintaku, principal investigator. All audiotapes will be transcribed by Vikki Rennick or by a paid transcriptionist. All written and recorded information, including interview notes, gathered during this study will be kept on a secure computer, in a locked file cabinet, or safety deposit box by the researcher. Transcripts of the audiotapes will be kept for a minimum of three years by the researcher in a secure location.

Participant’s initials

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time without repercussions. Additionally, you may decline to answer any question during the interviews that you prefer not to answer. If you withdraw from the study, information you have provided will be destroyed and not included in the final report.

QUESTIONS
Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Vikki Rennick at 503-705-5233 or by email at vikkirennick2@aol.com or Dr. Rich Shintaku at 541-737-9324 or by email at rich.shintaku@oregonstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.
Participant's Name (printed): _____________________________________________

__________________________________________  _________________________
(Signature of Participant)                    (Date)

RESEARCHER STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the participant or, where appropriate, with the participant's legally authorized representative, using a translator when necessary. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

__________________________________________  _________________________
(Signature of Researcher)                     (Date)
APPENDIX D: FRAMING QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS

Mentor Interview Framing Questions

*Interview One: Focused Life History*

- Tell me about your life history, especially the experiences that led you to become a mentor in this program.
- Have you had mentors in your life?
- What do you anticipate this mentoring experience will be like for you?

*Interview Two: The Details of the Experience*

- Now that you have been meeting with your mentee for a few months, what is it like to be a mentor?
- Describe a recent meeting with your mentee.

*Interview Three: Reflections on the Meaning*

- Reflecting back on this past year, what was the experience like, serving as a mentor?
- What does it mean to be a mentor?
- Did you notice any changes in your own perceptions or plans as a result of the mentoring experience?

Program Coordinator Interview Questions

- What themes arose during discussions with the women mentors regarding their experience as serving as a mentor in the Project Independence Mentoring Program?
- What themes emerged early in the mentoring experience, at mid-point, and then at the end of the academic year?
APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

The Lived Experience of Women Student Mentors
Expediting Review – Attachment

Student Demographic Questions

Responses to all of the following questions are voluntary. You may choose to answer all, some, or none of the questions. You can participate in the research study and not answer any of the following questions. The questions are asked to provide information that will help show the diversity or sameness of the research participant group.

Name (First & Last): ________________________________

Phone number(s): ________________________________

City of Current Residence: ________________________ Current Age: ________

Gross (prior to taxes) Income Level from all sources. Please check one:

☐ Less than $ 800.00 per month
☐ Less than $1,000.00 per month
☐ Less than $1,500.00 per month
☐ Less than $2,000.00 per month
☐ Less than $2,500.00 per month
☐ $2,500.00 or more per month

Income comments or questions:

_____________________________________________

Race/Ethnicity that you most identify with. Please check one:

☐ Latino/Latina
☐ Black, African American Non Latino
☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native
☐ Asian
☐ Pacific Islander
☐ White, Caucasian
☐ Multiracial
☐ Other, ________________________________
☐ Prefer not to answer

Number of college credit hours completed as of this date: _________
Number of credit hours being taken this fall term: __________

Your name, city of residence, and phone numbers will not be used in the research reports. All research participants will be identified by a pseudonym. Information concerning your age, income level, credit hours and race/ethnicity may be used in conjunction with the pseudonym. Responses to all of the questions are voluntary.
APPENDIX F: NOTIFICATION OF STUDY FOR MENTEE

Project Title: The Experience of Women Student Mentors
Principal Investigator: Dr. Rich Shintaku, OSU School of Education
Research Staff: Vikki Rennick, OSU Graduate Student

Dear Mentee:

Your mentor, __________________________, is participating in a research study designed to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of women community college students who serve as mentors to other women students. The study is expected to reveal patterns, themes, and insights into the experience of women students who mentor in a community college setting. The results of this study will be used to meet part of the requirements of a doctoral program at Oregon State University, School of Education, Community College Leadership Program.

The mentor will be interviewed by the researcher, Vikki Rennick, three times during this academic year (September 2004–June 2005). While the focus of this study is the mentor’s experience, we wanted to be sure that you are aware of this research. Additionally, during one of the interviews, the second interview, the mentor will be asked to discuss their experience of mentoring other women students. There is a possibility that during the third interview, which is a reflection on the mentoring experience, your mentor may refer to you. To protect your confidentiality and anonymity, we have asked the mentor only to use your first name if they referred to you during discussions with the researcher. Any reference to you on the transcripts of the interviews will be replaced with a pseudonym. Your mentor has also been instructed to discuss and clarify with you any conversations that have taken place between the two of you that you do not want to have repeated to the researcher.

The form below is for you to return to the research to help ensure that conversations you do not want to share are not repeated. A self addressed envelope is attached for your use in returning the tear off form below.

QUESTIONS
Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Vikki Rennick at 503-705-5233 or by email at vikkirennick2@aol.com or Dr. Rich Shintaku at 541-737-9324 or by email at rich.shintaku@oregonstate.edu.

- - Return this bottom section to the researcher in the envelope attached. Thank you. Vikki Rennick
I received the written notice regarding the research study, The Experience of Women Student Mentors. I understand that my mentor is participating in this study during this academic year (9/04 – 6/05).

I understand that the second interview between my mentor and the researcher will include a discussion about a recent meeting between my mentor and me and what it is like for my mentor to serve as a mentor. I have discussed with my mentor what I feel comfortable having shared from our conversations and what I do not want to be shared with the researcher.

☐ I have asked the certain information not be shared.
☐ There is not information that I am concerned about having shared.

Comments:

________________________________________________________

Print First Name, plus Signature ____________________________ Date
APPENDIX G: HORIZONTALIZATION/REDUCTION OF INTERVIEW

SHARON, FIRST INTERVIEW

1. ended up in this program... mentoring just, you know, my thing with mentoring is just kind of like the social psychology of it all is being able to emulate another

2. having mentors in my life

3. be able to help another coming up and going through the same experience.

4. A little bit about the history, I'm a recovering addict

5. what comes along with that, with women, is just a lot of the suffering, the self esteem, the lack of confidence

6. the things that women go through and basically just being able to move on past that, get clean and start doing something productive in my life

7. to be able to share that with another that's coming through the same process

8. going to school, being able to set goals and, and, and trying to achieve them

9. setting up things that I hadn't done in my past.

10. to be able to get through your day to day hassles

11. to be able to manage your schedule

12. having the confidence that you can do it

13. the program through another friend that gone through it herself

14. I took action steps to, to try and do that
in the beginning what I was up against is I struggled a little bit
when I approached the school in itself and they gave me all these papers
overwhelming, sent me home with them
I was trying to sort through it and, and figure it out myself
hit a stumbling block and it took me another three months
to be able to put everything in motion
that’s when I had signed up for the Returning Women’s Program class
I could get that step forward and start moving through it
when you very first start school you get all these paper and stuff and you
don’t really understand what they’re all about
all the questions that they’re asking, whether it’s just formal, or whether it’s
something that needs to be answered
you’re getting bills and different you know things in the mail
it’s just kind of an overwhelming process
it took me another three months to take that initial step, and begin the
program myself.
it was Spring of 2003
[my friend] was in the class prior to me
the Returning Women’s Program classes go for three months
she was in the class a couple of times prior to that
APPENDIX G: HORIZONTALIZATION/REDUCTION OF INTERVIEW

SHARON, FIRST INTERVIEW, Continued

32. you go three times a week and it’s from 9:00 to 1:00
33. you have a motivational exercise thing
34. you have a support group
35. and your map, anxiety things that, that they instruct on
36. other organizations stuff, support, and then career guidance
37. looking into some careers
38. then also some personality interests testing
39. the biggest thing of it was the support from this person named Deborah
40. just the support of somebody being able to tell you, you basically can
41. you can do this
42. primarily what happens there is the old saying, birds of a feather flock together
43. and as you get into a support group of the girls that you’re going to school with
44. it’s like it’s an influence
45. we’re still in touch, with a lot of them
46. you see each other through your passing and check in
47. we have alumni with the women’s program
48. we get together and go discuss your struggles
49. of going through school, making decisions, what you decide to do. All of those things

50. it is once a week

51. it's an identity that you have with the class that carries with you

52. throughout your little school career here

53. our mentoring was just coming into the office which is not, a bad thing

54. basically where you were, that's from that point on is just kind of kicked up to the reality of the real world of the school

55. had to figure things out, basically for yourself by asking many of questions

56. figuring out the resources all yourself by, just going through the process of asking many questions

57. I think it's ideal that they're putting together, mentor thing

58. those questions that you may feel, you know, not as comfortable asking them, feeling like you're stupid and that you should be able to do this stuff

59. you'll have somebody, they'll have somebody to ask, you know to help them through the things that we went through.

60. With not just getting kicked out there and, and, and have to figure it out.

61. it's based on more your parents, your teachers, it's just wherever there's influences and those values
APPENDIX G: HORIZONTALIZATION/REDUCTION OF INTERVIEW

SHARON, FIRST INTERVIEW, Continued

62. things come into play in your life that makes you have that decision to go back to school

63. you start reflecting a little bit on that

64. I happened to have a crisis that happened, where parents passed away

65. when you have a life changing incident like that, you start re-evaluating

66. your values of education, and coming back and giving it a chance again

67. Education was huge.

68. I took some wrong turns and, and, you know went off to the left

69. by that time you decide to get things right, those values that you start, thinking about and it is what gets you back in here

70. teachers just being positive in themselves

71. they teach you that you can

72. I was always a good student.

73. given the time that I was going to come back

74. giving it a shot, I have that in my mind that I can do well

75. with a little effort, you know, everything is achievable

76. So teachers are definitely a big influence in anybody's life

77. One that comes to my mind the most is my first grade teacher

77. the first grade teacher when you're at, you're initially getting started out.

78. I was a quick learner
just having that extra praise, that extra encouragement, that extra everything
your work done and get to do the little extra things, that’s the influence
And there’s counselors along the way
for me personally because I’m a recovering addict
Now whether I wanted to accept it at the time, they planted seeds
at the time I decided to make changes in my life, they’re forever respected
It’s been 4 and half years. Four and a half years clean.
what its going to look like is just basically reaching out a hand to another
because they’re going to be coming in and going through the same struggles
that I just went through.
to be able to have somebody they can ask questions to
that’s not going to make them feel like they’re stupid for asking
Because when you’re kicked back out into the college campus life
trying to adjust and get along, you feel like you almost should know these
things, but you don’t
I just want to be able to be there and to help them
give them the resources that they need
if I can’t answer it, find out who can
because I’ve been here now going on my fifth term at this campus
and have done work study in the office, and different places
APPENDIX G: HORIZONTALIZATION/REDUCTION OF INTERVIEW

SHARON, FIRST INTERVIEW, Continued

97. gotten to know quite a few of the resources
98. I hope that will be helpful for them
99. Allow them to make their own decisions
100. be able to send them to the professionals that they need to be sent to
101. to give them a little guidance, to be able to help them take the next step
102. It was just being new, scared
103. You're 43, sitting in classes amongst a lot of youngsters
104. I hadn't been in school for over 20-25 years
105. fears and direction
106. at that that time, unfortunately my tightest friend from the program isn't going to school anymore
107. but I had that person to walk with, both of us coming out of the program at the same time
108. And so we initially got into our classes, and had a pal
109. I've got my feet on the ground to where I'm comfortable, kind of making my way
110. I've gone to different campuses, Southeast, but I seem to gravitate towards this campus, I like the diversity
111. this Women's Resource Center is probably the best thing they have on campus, for comfortability, mingling
APPENDIX G: HORIZONTALIZATION/REDUCTION OF INTERVIEW

SHARON, FIRST INTERVIEW, Continued

112. You know, it's a daily base where you can come in, relax, drink your coffee, see familiar faces

113. it's an outlet here, to just to be comfortable

114. Making decisions about my direction is still the hardest

115. it's okay, you may come in one direction, and veer off in another

116. As you start discovering different interests and getting back in the mix of things

117. you don't have to be dead set on exactly what path that you're

118. And I'm still not comfortable with that

119. I want to have direction and I want to have a focus of a particular way

120. the unknown I can't see it, I just continue to put one foot in front of another

121. there are certain classes that you gotta take to get your prerequisites

122. I've been coming here, going on my second year

123. thinning out to where a path that I'm probably going to commit to take.

124. This term I am taking 9 credits and that's enough for me

125. juggling family and active son. Little league mom,

123. and his practices are three days a week

124. just the daily hassles of running a household

125. Nine is sufficient.
APPENDIX G: HORIZONTALIZATION/REDUCTION OF INTERVIEW

SHARON, FIRST INTERVIEW, Continued

126. I'm at 50 some credits, I think 53 credits

127. I'm thinking real strongly about what I came initially wanting to do,
    working with the juveniles

128. There's a little flexibility, on what I'm thinking about doing

129. I want to go where my heart is, or do I want to go where some money is.

130. those are kind of the decisions that I'm making

131. working with kids, there's not going to be no money

132. it's time to commit to make a decision. It's slowly happening.

133. I think the comfortability will come when I finally focus on one direction.

134. the only reason I am really able to go to school is because I have that other
    half.

135. primarily just because I see a lot of women suffering with a lot of the same
    things, and I do refer a lot of women here

136. to get started because they're stuck kind of

137. I see so much potential in people

138. they're not really understanding how to access it

139. they suffer depression, sleeping, affecting every outlet of their life

140. when all they need is, a step in the right direction, without a doubt they'll
    take off
SHARON, FIRST INTERVIEW, Continued

141. I think I’d be pretty compassionate and pretty understanding of any walk of life

142. any of these women, and what they’ve gone through.

143. it’s been kind of been set-up for, women that have been through any kind of domestic violence, substance abuse, displaced homemakers

144. just changing a career, of getting started

145. there’s been some things that have happened through my past that have identifying almost with every one of those areas

146. you have those certain things still against you, whether, it happened ten years ago or not, it’s still there.