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PEER MENTORING EXPERIENCE OF FIRST YEAR AT-RISK BLACK MALES AND THE  
EFFECT OF PEER MENTORING ON MENTORS AND MENTEES AT A RURAL PWI

by

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A Capstone Report  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Education

School of Education  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
May 2024

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**CAPSTONE REPORT APPROVAL**

**PEER MENTORING EXPERIENCE OF FIRST YEAR AT-RISK BLACK MALES AND THE  
EFFECT OF PEER MENTORING ON MENTORS AND MENTEES AT A RURAL PWI**

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Kristopher Anthony Marshall

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

in the field of Educational Administration and Higher Education

Approved by:

Dr. Saran Donahoo, Chair

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Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
March 22, 2024

## **AN ABSTRACT OF THE CAPSTONE REPORT OF**

Kristopher Anthony Marshall, for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Administration and Higher Education, presented on March 22, 2024, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

**TITLE: PEER MENTORING EXPERIENCE OF FIRST YEAR AT-RISK BLACK MALES  
AND THE EFFECT OF PEER MENTORING ON MENTORS AND MENTEES AT A  
RURAL PWI**

**MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Saran Donahoo**

As universities and colleges witness increasing diversity in student populations, disparities in graduation rates persist among minority groups, particularly Black men. Despite efforts to increase retention rates, Black men students continue to trail their peers. This phenomenological study examines the impact of a peer mentoring program on at-risk Black men at a rural Predominantly White Institution (PWI), exploring both student and mentor experiences. Drawing on a diverse body of literature, including student development theories and existing retention initiatives, this study sought to understand the efficacy and effectiveness of peer mentoring in supporting at-risk Black male students' academic success at a rural PWI. Through an exploration of perceptions and experiences from both mentees and mentors, this study provides insights into effective strategies for improving retention rates among Black men in higher education. Recommendations for future research and institutional practices are also discussed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank God for blessing me beyond my wildest dreams. He has watched over me and protected me throughout my life before I even understood the power of his grace. To my chair, Dr. Saran Donahoo, thank you for consistently pushing me to stop putting off my doctoral journey. Your guidance throughout this process has been everything I needed to reach this point, thank you for all your help. To my committee members Dr. Joseph A. Brown, Dr. Gary Kelly, and Dr. William B. Colwell thank you for impacting my journey, your guidance and encouragement kept me going throughout this arduous process.

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Krissy, my love for both of you surpasses what words can adequately convey. Abrianna, I thank you for being a motivating factor contributing to my desire to complete this laborious task. I sought to demonstrate to you that anything is achievable with dedication and a willingness to make sacrifices. Krissy, the news of your impending arrival fueled my determination to embark on my doctoral journey without further delay. It motivated me to accomplish something unprecedented in our family and serves as a testament that with dedication, grit, and persistence anything is achievable—a lesson I hope to impart to you as you grow older.

To my wife Sharonda Marshall, thank you for your companionship, compassion, understanding, and support throughout this journey. The substantial hours away from home, dedicated to pursuing this doctoral degree, have not gone unnoticed, and I deeply appreciate the sacrifices you have made. Your commitment and encouragement have been instrumental, and I acknowledge that I could not have achieved this without you by my side. Thank you, I love you.

To my research participants, your experiences resonate deeply with my own during my first year in college. I want to emphasize that with dedication and sacrifice, you too can overcome the doubts and statistics that may suggest otherwise. I leave you with the profound words my father frequently shared with me after engaging in lengthy discussions and debates on various critical subjects: The struggle continues.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Shirley Ann Marshall, who embarked on this journey with me in 2020 however, unfortunately, passed away on January 16th, 2024, before witnessing its completion. I am confident that you are observing the achievements of your first grandchild, and I hope to have brought you pride. I love you and I miss you dearly.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Universities and colleges across the nation have consistently become increasingly diverse; the demographics of students attending college have changed steadily over time to include more minorities. The demographics of students are rapidly changing, an American Council on Education report found, “between 1996 and 2016, the non-White share of undergraduates grew from 29.6% to 45.2%, while the non-White share of graduate students grew from 20.8% to 32.0%” (Espinosa et al., 2019, p. 13). Black men’s six-year graduation rates fall short of their Black women counterparts and well below their White peers. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2020) reported, in 2018-2019, only 10.3% of all degrees conferred went to Black students, 14.9% to Hispanic students and 62.3% to White students. Furthermore, NCES (2020) also reported, in the 2018-2019 academic year, 11.4% of Black female students earned their bachelor’s degree, 8.8% of Black males earned their bachelor’s degree. Additionally, 15.7% of Hispanic female students and 13.9% of Hispanic males earned their degree. Also 60.8% of White female and 64.3% of White male students completed their degrees in that same year (NCES, 2020). This indicates minority students continue to have lower degree completion rates despite increases in college attendance and participation.

One minority subgroup consistently behind their peers in college completion and six-year graduation rates are Black men. A 2017 NCES report found only 34.3% of Black males earned their bachelor’s degree. The six-year graduation rates of Black men in higher education across the country indicate a problem: Some Black men succeed in completing their degree; however, they are not retained at a significant level and do not persist to graduation at the same rates as their peers.

Retention and persistence of Black men in higher education has been a focus of many studies over the years. Institutions across the country have taken on the task of increasing Black men's retention in college. Educational researchers have highlighted the need to increase the number of Black men who complete an undergraduate degree (Brooms, 2018; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Palmer et al., 2014). Given that Black men have low six-year graduation rates from college, there seems to be a disconnect as to what works to help retain them and have them persist through to earning a degree. I do not think it is a matter of Black men not being able to succeed in academia; rather, on predominately White college campus' what factors make it more likely that they will be academically successful?

Clauss-Ehlers and Wibrowski (2007) suggested, "educational resilience can be fostered through academic programs that include a strong, consistent, supportive counseling component that addresses both academic and personal issues" (p. 583). Several studies concluded creating support environments can contribute to Black men's success including establishing settings or programs that support Black men in adjusting to college life socially, and that draw on and strengthen Black men's values (Brooms, 2021; Cintron et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2017; Cuyjet, 2006; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Palmer et al., 2014). Institutional led peer mentor programs seek to address these issues in at-risk populations such as Black men. Thus, I sought to understand what affect the peer mentoring experience has on the peer mentors themselves. Ottley (2018) indicated, "rarely have studies explored the perceptions of retention programs through the lenses of its participants" (p. 11). I hoped to gain further insights into how they perceived their experience serving as a mentor to at-risk Black men students at a rural predominately White institution, commonly referred to as a PWI.

### **Problem Statement**

Black men are not graduating at the same rate as their peers. More study is necessary to further understand this trend and what influences Black men's success in college. According to NCES (2020), Black males' six-year graduation rate is 34%, and Black females' graduation rate stands at 44%. Additionally, White male students' graduation rate is 61% and White female students graduate at 67%. The national graduation rate amongst students of all races is 57% for males and 63% for females (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Individual characteristics play a role in how Black men students perceive their ability to succeed in college. College preparedness, family involvement, campus experiences, social involvement and campus culture play a pivotal role in shaping Black men's attitudes about their college experience (Strayhorn, 2016). Typically, when students enter a new place or environment which they have not travelled before, they seek to follow those who have taken a comparable "road" to success. I often think of what made me continue to stay the course when things got tough, and I felt overwhelmed. Looking back on my college experience, one thing stands out as a key factor of my success in completing my first year of college and completion of my undergraduate degree: mentoring.

### **Research Questions**

My research questions focus on three areas, at-risk Black men's retention, and peer mentoring at rural PWIs and the experiences of the peer mentors. Those questions were:

1. What affect does peer mentoring have on at-risk Black men at rural PWI's?
2. What are at-risk Black men students' perceptions and experiences at a rural PWI?
3. What affect does peer mentoring at-risk Black men have on the peer mentor at a rural PWI?

## **Background and Purpose**

Peer mentoring has been used by higher education institutions as a retention strategy to help retain students (Heirdsfield et al., 2008; Hill & Reddy, 2007). The theory that peer-to-peer interaction can foster a greater connection between students to campus and lead to better outcomes is a derivative of various student development theories including Astin's (1977) student involvement theory and Tinto's (1975) theories of student departure and social integration. Rodger and Tremblay (2003) also cited the positive affect peer mentoring had on student persistence. Furthermore, Salinitri (2005) examined the utilization of peer mentoring on first year students' academic success which showed increased student retention and persistence. Also Brooms (2018), Harper (2016), Ottley (2018), and Ottley and Ellis (2014) cited the experiences Black men have at rural PWIs and the retention initiatives, including peer mentoring programs designed to retain them at a higher rate. Furthermore, Broom and Davis (2017) and Harper and Wood (2015) suggested having access to resources and a mentor helped Black men students.

According to Brooms (2020), "In response to calls for improving their plight, Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs have been established at a number of colleges and universities in efforts to increase Black male students' retention and graduation" (p. 219). Furthermore, Brooms (2020) suggested BMI programs can be a nurturing environment with the potential to serve a variety of purposes, including putting students near one another to foster strong peer relationships and give them opportunities to interact and exchange cultural knowledge. Fullard (2019) conveyed BMI programs provide supportive community-based principles based on African principles. One aspect shared among many BMI programs is peer-to-peer mentoring, "BMI advocates for racialized hiring, and creating a peer group where students can engage with

others who are pursuing their degrees and involved in student leadership” (Fullard, 2019, p. 124). Rural PWI’s offer a unique environment that supports Black men students, with the cultural atmosphere on campus playing a key role in fostering this sense of support. Clark and Brooms (2018) stated, “The benefits that Black men accrue in these environments are important especially given the concerns and challenges that they face at historically White institutions” (p. 399). Underrepresented at-risk populations of students such as Black men come to campus with a unique perspective of their environment. This study sought to gain a better understanding of the interconnectedness of those student’s perceptions and experiences in relation to peer mentoring in their first year at a rural PWI.

### **Definitions**

**At-Risk Student:** Students who come to college underprepared are often classified as “at-risk” (Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). *The Glossary of Education Reform* refers to at-risk students as having a higher-than-average probability of not completing school (Ravitch, 2007). Specifically, for the purposes of this study, the Saluki Success Initiative program defines students accepted into their program as “students who show potential for college-level work but who do not meet regular University admissions requirements.” (SIU Exploratory Student Advisement, n.d.).

**Black:** The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “Black” as various population groups of especially African ancestry often considered as having dark pigmentation of the skin but in fact having a wide range of skin colors. The National Archives defines *Black* as the preferred term when referring to an individual’s race and should be capitalized and used as an adjective. The term *Black* can be used regardless of nationality while African American is specific to Americans of African descent (National Archives, n.d.). Some Black individuals

in the United States identify with both terms and some prefer one term over the other (Sigelman et al., 2005).

**Peer Mentoring:** Peer mentoring is a relationship between a more experienced student and a less experienced student to improve academic performance, provide advice, support, and knowledge to the mentee (Colvin & Ashman 2010).

**PWI:** A “predominantly White institution” describes a higher education institution in which White students comprise 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Sprull & Starling, 2021).

**Rural:** The U.S. Census Bureau defines “rural” as what is not “urban”—that is, after defining individual urban areas, rural is what is left. (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *rural* as “of or relating to the country, country people or life, or agriculture” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

### **Positionality**

As a Black American man scholar in higher education, I have spent the past 12 years working with students from diverse backgrounds at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I have served as an academic advisor to undeclared, provisionally admitted students in the Colleges of Liberal Arts and Agricultural Science. During this time, I have worked on retention initiatives, coordinated the mentoring program for students within the Saluki Success Initiative, recruited new students at Open House events, and represented SIUC at college fairs throughout the region. Additionally, I have supervised undergraduate and graduate students. I have also coordinated various retention-focused initiatives to help retain at-risk and Black students. I have always had an interest in Black men’s student success. As a Black man who was provisionally admitted to SIUC in 2003, I have maintained a consistent interest in this population of students and their overall success in academia. As a student, I saw my peers struggle with various issues



and I noticed, as the years passed, a declining number of my original Black men classmates remained at the institution approaching graduation. As an administrator, I have noticed the persistent academic, social, and emotional struggles of this population. I have a personal and professional interest in this student population. I wish to contribute to the research and hope to gain a better understanding of Black men students at a PWI.

### **Significance of Study**

This study is significant because higher education needs to help these students graduate once they are admitted and enrolled. This population of students persistently does not graduate from higher education institutions at the same rate as their peers and institutions need to find out how to stop that trend. If the trend does not stop, the number of Black men without bachelor's degrees will continue to fade behind their peers and the educational attainment gap will continue.

I wanted to identify characteristics of students perceived ability to succeed in academia given their experiences during their first year at a rural PWI with a peer mentor. Ottley (2018) indicated few studies “examine the experiences of Black male college students who attend a PWI located on a rural campus.” (p. 11). Additionally, I hoped to gain a better understanding of the peer mentoring experience from the mentors' perspective and better understand how the experience may or may not have influenced them as a student at a rural PWI. Identifying which characteristics may be predictors or triggers of success amongst Black men may be of help to influence administrative policies and best practices within higher education. A study such as this could lead to improvement in college success, retention, and persistence among Black men, in order to narrow the achievement gap amongst their peers.

In this study, I sought to further advance administrators' knowledge and research base to understand what policies or programs they should put in place to help a critical population who

has continued to struggle over the years. The rate at which Black men do not persist through to graduate in six years needs attention and the problem must be solved. Additionally, I sought to gain a deeper understanding as to what additional contributing factors lead to success for Black males at PWIs.

Furthermore, I think the information gained through this research can potentially lead to improved academic outcomes for Black men. In addition, it could contribute to best practices within first-year experience programs affecting Black men students. Through my lived experience, mentoring played a pivotal role in my perceptions of success in college. I wanted to research if my assumptions and experiences could potentially be the basis for changing the current trends and contribute to assisting with narrowing the achievement gap. Given that, I centered my research questions on Black men and their perceptions and experiences at a rural predominantly White institution. Also, I want to evaluate my hypothesis concerning mentoring and its potential effects on Black men at rural PWI's and its effects on the students who serve as a peer mentors. This study addresses a void in the existing literature by investigating the perspectives surrounding a retention program for at-risk Black males within a predominantly White institution located in a rural setting.

### **Overview**

The remainder of this document provides an overview of the existing literature concerning peer mentoring within higher education institutions; peer mentoring to support the retention of Black students; barriers to success faced by Black students; and peer mentoring characteristics versus faculty mentoring. Also, Chapter III identifies the research methodology and research design for the study. Moreover, this chapter also describes the research setting, demographics, participant population and methods of data collection. Additionally, Chapter IV

outlines the findings of the study and Chapter V summarizes the findings of the study as well as offers implications and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Peer mentoring has long been an interest of mine. From the moment I stepped on the campus of Southern Illinois University, I had a mentor I could relate to and ask questions of, if I was hesitant to ask another student or an instructor. Peer mentoring changed my life and helped push me to complete college. Scholars have examined the impact and role mentors play in the corporate world and academia for decades (Brooks et al., 2013; Brown et al., 1971; Budge, 2006; Collings et al., 2014; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; DeAngelo, 2014; Freeman, 1999; Gershenfeld, 2014; Good et al., 2000; Jacobi, 1999; Kiyama & Luca, 2014; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Lee, 1999; Ottley & Ellis, 2019; Patton & Harper, 2003; Patton, 2009; Peck, 2011; Rodger & Tremblay, 2003; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007; Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998; Winston & Ender, 1988; Zunker, 1975). Universities and colleges across the nation have adopted numerous forms of peer mentoring programs to increase retention rates of first-year students, African American students, undergraduate and graduate minority Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) students, and other special populations of students. The following is a brief synopsis of the literature and history of peer mentoring within higher education, barriers and challenges faced by Black students in higher education and how peer mentoring is distinctly different from faculty mentoring.

#### **History and Role of Peer Mentoring Within Higher Education Institutions**

Over the past 60 years, higher education institutions have sought to find ways to improve student retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Peer mentoring has become a widely adopted concept within higher education. Peer mentoring in higher education institutions follows the

traditional mentoring model which emphasizes relationships that offer *acceptance, confirmation, counselling, role modelling, and friendship* (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). A substantial proportion of universities in the United States utilize some form of peer mentoring programs to help students at the undergraduate level. Stoller (2021) states:

Most American universities and an increasing number of international institutions of higher education have adopted some form of a formalized undergraduate peer mentoring program, which is usually centered on a site of student transition – for example, between high school and college, or as students enter a new program of study. (p. 53)

Universities have utilized peer mentoring programs as first-year experience tools to help become more engaged with their campus environment and to help retain students after their first year.

Additionally, peer mentoring has been utilized to offer support to at-risk students and students in STEM fields (Asempapa et al., 2021; Griffin et al., 2010).

Historically, peer mentoring in higher education originated from influential scholars, and many mentoring programs primarily programs rely on Astin's (1977, 1984, 1999) student involvement theory; Tinto's (1975, 1982, 1988, 1993) theories of student departure and social integration; Bandura's (1977, 1989) social learning theory; and Perry's (1970) theory of cognitive development as foundations to guide program policies and practices. Peer mentoring programs in higher education historically have served as a retention strategy—the programs often occur at the beginning of an undergraduate student's academic journey. Universities over the years have recognized peers have a significant impact on one another, and the goal has been to harness this ability to generate influence between peers (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

Additionally, Winston and Ender (1988) state, “student paraprofessionals in U.S. higher education can be traced to the colonial period. Students have been providing assistance to each

other for as long as there have been schools. In colleges, the first known student paraprofessionals were tutors” (p. 466). Peer-to-peer retention initiatives to foster learning in higher education is not a new concept; peer tutors have functioned in institutions for many years.

Several studies over the years have documented the increasing evolution and prevalence of peer-to-peer programs on college campuses (Brown et al., 1971; Powell, 1959; Zunker, 1975). Ganser and Kennedy (2012) emphasized the origins of peer-to-peer leadership roles originates from student orientation and residence life positions. Crisp and Cruz (2009) recognized, though the peer mentoring programs vary between campuses and are not homogeneous, there are commonalities within higher education institutions. Jacobi (1991) suggests, “In addition to the diversity in the components of mentoring programs, they vary in their goals and objectives. Even those programs that focus on academic success, as opposed to personal development, may differ in the outcomes of interest” (p. 518). Mentoring programs vary from student focused programs centered around academic success, retention, and assimilating to the college environment. Additionally, mentoring programs can also focus on career centered outcomes for new faculty trying to assimilate in an unfamiliar environment. Both mentoring relationships seek to develop a relationship, however, the desired outcomes distinctly differ between the two. Furthermore, Gershenfeld (2014) studied 20 undergraduate mentoring programs from 2008 to 2012 and suggests, “the proliferation of mentoring programs is based more on aspects of social validity whereby the value is determined by participant perceptions” (p. 385). Perception plays a role in how mentoring relationships are perceived by the mentor and mentee.

Accordingly, Stoller (2021) characterized mentoring programs that have developed over the years into four framework categories of focus within higher education settings. The frameworks identified include mentoring as increasing involvement; mentoring as facilitating

integration; mentoring as providing support; and mentoring as role modeling. Over the years, peer mentoring programs in higher education institutions have typically served undergraduate first-year students. Institutions have focused on pairing first-year students with senior students to help them become acclimated to life as a college student. Collings et al. (2014) stated peer mentoring is frequently linked with student integration in higher education. The role of peer mentoring in higher education has evolved over time; however, Seery et al. (2021) indicated, “Peer mentors are usually full-time students and taking on the mentor role, in addition to study and other obligations, brings a range of logistical, interpersonal, and emotional challenges” (p. 665). Institutions have utilized undergraduate upperclassmen students to serve as a connection to new incoming students to help them get involved and acclimated to college life. Jacobi (1991) asserts all formal mentoring programs utilize some model of mentoring in relation to academic success. Furthermore, as peer-to-peer programs have evolved, there has been an emphasis on establishing these programs during students’ first year in college. Peer mentoring has grown as a pragmatic approach in retention-based initiatives and to support students as they transition to college life (Lane, 2020). Furthermore, Lane (2020) suggests that peer mentoring in the first year emerged as a useful strategy because of the retention rates of first year students and the individual cost ramifications of students not completing college.

Studies have documented how higher education institutions have utilized peer mentoring programs on their campuses. Rodger and Tremblay (2003) studied students at the University of Western Ontario, where 4,400 students were accepted as first-year students, 537 out of 983 students who applied for mentoring were randomly selected to be a part of a peer mentoring program. The remaining students served as a control group. There was also a third group of 506 students selected randomly from the first-year population who did not apply to the program

(Rodger & Tremblay, 2003). A total of 95 peer mentors were selected to serve a group of five to seven students, each. Also, groups of peer mentors were matched with 21 mentor team leaders who were fourth-year students who shared their academic path. The peer mentors shared study tips, encouraged students to take advantage of the academic resources on campus and introduced them to various campus resources. The students' participation level in the peer mentoring activities varied; the researchers assessed the student's participation level on a scale of one to five. Students who received scores of four or five in the participation level were grouped together in a modified peer mentor group. The peer-mentored, applicant-control, and non-applicant control groups showed no significant differences in retention among the three groups. "However, when participation level among Peer Mentored students was taken into account, a positive effect was detected" (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003, p. 12). "This study revealed that participation is not contingent on level of academic motivation; and given that students with high levels of participation (Modified Peer Mentor Group) experienced significantly higher grades, more research is needed to identify what influences participation" (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003, p. 12). The findings of this study indicate student's participation in the mentoring experience had some effect on their academic performance. However, it is unclear what factors contributed to and influenced a student's desire to participate in the peer mentoring program.

First-year retention programs focused on peer mentoring have continued across the academic spectrum. A 2011 study by Peck focused on a peer involvement advising program on the campus of Stephen F. Austin State University. The Center typically served new students to the campus, providing the students with peer advising. Also, the program collaborated with the First-Year Seminar program which encouraged instructors to incorporate peer advisement sessions into their courses (Peck, 2011). The advisors focus on a variety of topics from student



engagement in outdoor activities, leadership, student organizations and fraternity/sorority life. The peer advisors also set goals with the students they advised; they discuss how to balance their involvement with their overall academic responsibilities as well as how to manage their time (Peck, 2011). There was no typical advising session; students were given the freedom to discuss diverse topics with the students as well as refer them to different programs which could help their students. Students in the program expressed more comfort and willingness to discuss topics with their peers versus professionals. The study showed “among students who participated in the peer advising process, 91 per-cent said that it made them feel more connected to the university” (Peck, 2011, p. 24). Also, students reported that “the program helped them keep their schoolwork, social life, and cocurricular experiences in balance” (Peck, 2011, p. 24). Students who participated in the program were retained at a higher rate than the university overall rate as well. There were also benefits for the peer advisors as well -- they stated being an advisor increased their appreciation for diversity and improved the connection between their learning and personal development as a leader.

Programs to retain students have been the focus of research for years; Tinto (1975) highlighted a theory of looking at retention as a reflection of student's acclimation and integration to the university setting over time. DeAngelo (2014) cited Tinto's influence on a national longitudinal survey conducted on first-time, full-time students. Data were retrieved from the Cooperative Institutional Research Programs (CIRP), from 2007 Freshman Survey (TFS) and 2008 Your First College Year (YFCY). Data were collected from over 26,000 students across 487 institutions (DeAngelo, 2014). Weighted data collected from the study represented the national population of students at four-year institutions who completed their first year. Three variables emerged from the data as contributing to a student's likelihood to return for the

following year. First-year curriculum; discussing course content with other students outside of class; and other first-year experiences were indicators of a student's likelihood of returning for their sophomore year (DeAngelo, 2014). The study indicated having a first-year curriculum offered to students was not enough alone to influence retention. Additionally, "Institutions need to think more thoughtfully not only about the quality of their offerings but perhaps even more importantly about how well these experiences are integrated and central to the fabric of the institution" (DeAngelo, 2014, p. 66). The most important finding was the importance of engagement between students outside of the classroom.

Students who get together with other students to talk about the content of their courses, who study together in groups, who interact intellectually with students from different races/ethnicities, and who interact with faculty are more likely to intend to persist and continue into the second year. (DeAngelo, 2014, p. 66)

The study called for more student affairs administrators to foster an environment where more of these interactions can occur to increase the persistence of students.

Studying the effects of peer mentoring has continued in higher education institutions to further understand the effects of mentoring on the mentor and the mentees. An exploratory inquiry by Kiyama and Luca (2014) conducted at a large research institution focused on a six-week summer program for first-year students. The study focused on understanding the influence peer mentors had on student retention and success, from the view of the peer mentors. The study collected data through personal narratives from online essays and focus groups with peer mentors. The program consists of about 250 students each year (Kiyama & Luca, 2014). Many of the students graduated from in-state high schools and met the requirements to receive need-based financial aid. The student population consisted of a majority of Latina or Hispanic students. The

program had three components the peer mentors were responsible for: hall safety, programming, and community building (Kiyama & Luca, 2014). The peer mentors lived on campus; met with students daily in a small group setting; and focused on student success items—including financial planning; time management; diversity and inclusion; and campus resources. The peer mentors also met individually with their students twice during the summer. The participants in the study provided personal narratives about their experiences in the program as peer mentors (Kiyama & Luca, 2014). Students expressed how they grew personally during the training as a peer mentor and how they had become better individuals during the program. Another mentor stated the program contributed to his retention at the university. The stated overall sentiment of students was that “Students’ roles as peer mentors became a new way of looking at themselves” (Kiyama & Luca, 2014, p. 506). The study suggested further research should include peer mentor alumni to understand the long-term effects of their time as a peer mentor.

### **Peer mentoring to Support the Retention of African American Students**

Peer mentoring over the years has served as a tool to improve student success outcomes. Budge (2006) indicated, “One of the major reasons why mentoring has been implemented in the university setting is to increase retention rates” (p. 75). Furthermore, Terrion and Leonard (2007) suggested, “college administrators have long sought to identify the support mechanisms necessary to improve the retention, academic success, and educational experience of their students” (p. 149). African American students particularly have struggled to graduate at the same rate as their peers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), Black males’ six-year graduation rate is 34% and Black females’ graduation rate stands at 44%. Additionally, White male students’ graduation rate is 61% and White female students graduate at 67%. The national graduation rate amongst students of all races is 57% for males and 63% for

females. Higher education institutions have turned to mentoring as a major component to help retention efforts with this population of students. Higher education institutions have pursued various strategies to help retain African American students at a higher rate; including specialized orientation programs; faculty mentoring programs; summer bridge programs; first year experience programs; and peer mentoring programs.

Mentoring programs have become a component of university retention efforts across the country. Influential studies (Budge, 2006; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991) have noted the limitations of existing research studying peer mentoring due to it not being clear, defined, and riddled with methodological and theoretical differences. Lee (1999) stated the “programs are generally targeted at student micropopulations (e.g., ethnic minorities, women, and academically underprepared students) and have the underlying goal of enhancing the institution's degree completion rates” (p. 32). Freeman (1999) suggested mentoring for African American students can be crucial to students’ persistence and completion at PWI’s. Moreover, higher education institutions have sought to utilize mentoring programs to increase retention of Black students. Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) asserted institutions have sought to implement mentoring programs to increase the percentage of minorities with college degrees to be more representative of the general population. Few studies have focused specifically on the peer mentoring of Black students. Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) also suggested few studies focus on Black students and fail to account for the differences between various forms of mentoring and have grouped Black and non-Black students.

Several studies have been conducted that detail how higher education institutions have utilized peer mentoring programs to help support and retain Black students (Brooks et al., 2013; Freeman, 1999; Good et al., 2000; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Lee, 1999; Mills, 2020; Ottley & Ellis,

2019; Patton, 2009; Simmons & Smith, 2020; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). A 1998 study by Schwitzer and Thomas conducted on a peer mentoring program housed in a student counseling center, recruited upper-class, good academic standing, and students from various cultural backgrounds to participate as peer mentors. The mentors provided support for first-year students during the Fall semester and had continuing contact during the Spring term. The mentors held an orientation meeting, periodic group meetings, as well as social events. The mentors focused on three intervention strategies: empathic support; solution-focused strategies, or suggestions; and referring the students to tutoring and career center counseling (Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998). After each student interaction, the mentors submitted a written report to provide feedback. A total of 187 African American first-year students out of 1925 students started their first year during the study. Fifty-two African American students volunteered for the peer mentor program (Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998). The study also collected performance data for nonparticipant minority students and non-minority students. Eighty-two percent of the participants in the mentoring program were female and 18% were male. The students in the mentoring program reported personal adjustment issues centering on academic stress, college transition pressures, as well as other-cultural issues (Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998). “Findings of this study suggest that, even though program participants’ cumulative grade point average after two years was slightly lower than the nonparticipant African-American students, the participants demonstrated greater persistence and progress toward graduation” (Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998, p. 43). Also, the study found a developmental difference between students who participated in the program versus nonparticipating African American first-year students. Conclusions from this study suggest participation in peer mentoring programs may have persisting benefits to students beyond their first year.

Additionally, a 2000 exploratory study by Good et al. at a land grant university in the southeast studied a group of nineteen peer mentors (four females and 15 males) involved in a minority engineering program. The mentors consisted of all African American engineering students who were upper class students. They were each assigned first-year students in the minority engineering program. They functioned as mentors and tutors to the students (Good et al., 2000). They interacted with the students in a variety of ways. They met with the students to share meals and recreational activities, as well as weekly problem-solving workshops focused on their studies in engineering. The study analyzed the mentors' personal journals written during the first quarter of the mentoring program (Good et al., 2000). The journal entries by the mentors indicated over 70% of the mentors experienced growth academically from their involvement in the mentoring program. The mentors reported improvement in their critical thinking skills, communication, confidence, identity, study skills and learning strategies during their time as mentors with the program. One of the mentors stated he felt "involved in the development of future leaders" (Good et al., 2000, p. 380). Furthermore, the mentors' grades increased during their first quarter serving as mentors compared to the year prior to serving as mentors in the program. The study suggested that "similar mentoring programs could be initiated at other universities to capitalize on the interpersonal and motivational gains experienced by the students in this study" (Good et al., 2000, p. 382). They also recommended further research of the effects of mentoring at other institutions across different settings.

A study at a large southeastern university in a metropolitan area studied a retention program focused on Black males (Brooks et al., 2013). Participant selection included using three criteria: gender, first-year classification, and ethnicity or race. The students ranged in age from 18 to 21 years old. The program selected 136 Black males; of that, 90 students completed the

program (Brooks et al., 2013). The program recruited participants, required students to enroll in a mandatory weekly seminar course, and paired students with upper class student mentors and program staff. Mentors paired with students by similar major interest, matching academically needy students with strong academic performing mentors and matched with students of similar likes and interests. The program also had an in-house alert system which identified if a student was struggling academically (Brooks et al., 2013). Students identified by instructors as struggling were required to attend a mandatory study hall. The results of the study showed “statistically significant results when comparing students who participate in a freshmen retention program to those students who do not” (Brooks et al., 2013, p. 217). Students in the study stated they had a strong relationship with their mentors, improved acculturation, and social integration to the university. The authors concluded, “This study has shown that African-American men, with some specific guidance through mentoring from point of freshman enrollment, supplemental nonacademic instruction, and monitoring; they have a stronger chance of staying in school, increasing the chances of positive college retention” (Brooks et al., 2013, p. 219). Furthermore, the literature indicates peer mentoring minority students at PWIs may play a role in their retention by their institutions. The literature suggests there is a need for retention programs in higher education institutions focused on peer mentoring Black students at PWI’s and those relationships may play a role in building a student’s connection to the university and potentially lead to greater retention.

### **Barriers to Success Faced by African American Students in Higher Education**

Higher education institutions have struggled to retain African American students for decades. It is a problem that persists; and it remains a difficult problem for policymakers to solve. Various scholars have studied the challenges faced by African American students in

higher education. Schwartz and Washington (1999) identified several factors that influence African American students' success in college—social adjustment; personal emotional adjustment; and being able to identify a strong support person were highlighted as barriers to success with African American women. Additionally, the first-year experience of African American women was critical to students' success in higher education. Schwartz and Washington (1999) also indicated African American females particularly face various barriers to success in college, including a lack of parental support, low self-esteem, low socioeconomic status, and low social expectations for completing college. Moreover, a 2020 study by Mills of Black college students attending a PWI found that the Black students experienced six types of environmental racial barriers and microaggressions including segregation, lack of representation, campus response to criminality, cultural bias in courses, tokenism, and pressure to conform. Johnson-Ahorlu (2012) suggested students of color experience racism and microaggressions from faculty and it has a substantive negative impact on students' performance academically.

A major 1992 study by Hurtado investigated how students of color experience racism at White colleges and universities. Participants in the study reported racial hostility on campus contrasted with White students' positive perceptions of the campus climate (Hurtado, 1992). Additionally, the longitudinal national study found “approximately one in four students perceived considerable racial conflict at four-year institutions in the late 1980s” (Hurtado, 1992, p. 560). The challenges African American students face include pressure to perform well academically or having to work harder than their White peers to prove themselves. Studies have also indicated stereotyping plays a role in African American students' experiences in higher education institutions.

Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) found students who participated in a qualitative study across



seven postsecondary institutions including five four-year institutions and two two-year institutions, “shared a common perception that faculty and classmates stereotyped African Americans as intellectually incapable and undeserving of university admission” (p. 387). In addition, African American students in higher education historically have been stereotyped as aggressive, physically threatening, hypersexualized, or intimidating. Morales (2014) noted Black women are “seen as loud and outspoken with domineering personalities” (p. 60). Furthermore, Morales (2014) indicated race, gender, and class influence Black students’ experiences at universities. Specifically, Morales concluded that in higher education institutions, “Black students encounter racialized notions of exoticism, hypersexuality and aggressiveness that are connected to ideas about low-income and working-class Black women and men” (p. 62). Black students often experience the stereotype and microaggression of perpetuating criminal behavior, especially Black men.

Solórzano et al. (2000) found African American students experienced discriminatory policing practices of African American student events and social functions by campus law enforcement. Furthermore, Harris et al. (2011) suggested “Black men in college are expected to project a cool and collected persona at all times, while academically proving themselves” (p. 56). Perceptions and stereotypes of Black men masculinity factor into how they are perceived and treated by those who they encounter on college campuses. Social assumptions ascribed to Black men lend themselves to Black men feeling that they must control themselves in every space they reside.

African American students’ challenges and barriers to success in higher education institutions have been studied and documented by scholars with the intent to increase retention efforts (Adams, 1992; Brooks et al., 2013; DeAngelo, 2014; Freeman, 1999; Good et al., 2000).

Several studies have been conducted in attempts to further analyze African American males' retention disparities within higher education (Gershenfeld, 2014; Harris et al., 2011; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). Additionally, institutions have started retention initiatives to improve African American student retention. The following studies I reviewed provide a brief overview of efforts aimed at improving African American student retention in higher education institutions.

The National Black Male College Achievement Study conducted by Harper (2009), collected data from 219 students at 42 colleges and universities in 20 states across the US. Data collected from 143 participants attending 30 predominantly White colleges and universities were included in this study. The phenomenological study sought to understand the lived experiences of high achieving Black male undergraduate students across six different institution types (Harper, 2009). Each Black male participated in face-to-face individual interviews on campus with follow up interviews conducted by phone. Harper collected data from transcripts of the student interviews. After the collection, Harper (2009) identified 166 recurring topics and reduced these to 166 code words. Using the NVivo qualitative data software program they produced 166 code reports which provided insights into the participants shared experiences. Across the 30 PWIs they found the students often experienced both racism and success on campus. Students expressed that they felt stereotyped and overlooked even though they were high academic achievers and student leaders. The author classified the issue the students experienced as "niggering." Furthermore, Harper (2009) suggested, "At PWI's, niggering is also evidenced by the misperception that all Black men are the same and the inability of White persons on these campuses to recognize the different cultural backgrounds of Black male students" (p. 701). "In almost all the interviews, each participant indicated no one had endeavored to understand how he was productively navigating the institution" (Harper, 2009, p.

709). Harper (2009) suggests that how Black men have been portrayed in media, literature, and public discourse contributes to how they are treated by administrators on campus.

Furthermore, an Ottley and Ellis (2019) study at a land-grant PWI in a rural environment studied Black males' perceptions of a retention initiative designed to increase Black male retention. The program studied consisted of predominately Black males; however, Hispanic, Native American, and White males participated in the program as well. Participants were assigned a mentor to support them and attended monthly empowerment sessions with faculty and graduate student peer mentors. Students were encouraged to meet with their mentors monthly outside of the empowerment sessions (Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Researchers interviewed 20 active students and recent graduates who served at least one year with the program. Participants expressed the program benefitted them by providing a mentor who looked like them. They expressed that the program helped motivate them to perform well academically. They also mentioned feelings of belonging and feeling supported by the program (Ottley & Ellis, 2019). One student interviewed highlighted his experience and stated, "Most of us are first generation college people, to have a sense of belonging to an organization or a group who make you more comfortable here and your experience a lot better" (Ottley & Ellis, 2019, p. 97). Some students described the monthly meetings as a safe space to express themselves. Ottley and Ellis (2019) concluded higher education professionals should search for ways to engage Black males in multiple spaces to improve retention. Simmons and Smith (2020) also suggested, "A sense of belonging and feeling supported is also critical to the success of many African American students" (p. 422). This study suggested key elements of Black males' success and retention in higher education is linked to them feeling a sense of belonging on campus. Furthermore, it also found motivation plays a role in their academic performance (Simmons & Smith, 2020).

In 1999, Lee conducted a qualitative investigation focused on African American students enrolled in a specialized program at a predominantly White public research university. This program catered to academically underprepared students, including those initially denied admission to the university who were later given conditional admission. The program was predominantly African American and Native American students (Lee, 1999). The programs goals were to enhance basic math, writing, critical thinking, and academic survival skills. The program conducted focus group interviews during the academic year focused on three areas. Student perspectives on their adjustment to the university, perspective on the value of a faculty mentor and student perspective on the significance of having a mentor of the same race (Lee, 1999). After collecting the data, three commonalities arose, adjustment to college, receptivity of having a faculty mentor, and race compatibility in attaining a mentor. Students in the study indicated they did not always experience positive interactions with African American faculty mentors (Lee, 1999). The study also found race was not pivotal in a faculty-student mentoring relationship. Students preferred to have a mentor who matched their academic career field regardless of race (Lee, 1999). The literature suggests students' engagement outside of the classroom is an integral part of minority students' adjustment to the college environment (Mangold et al., 2002; Nora & Crisp, 2007). Also, the literature suggests providing support programs where students feel safe to express themselves is an important ingredient to a student's potential persistence in college.

### **Peer Mentoring vs. Faculty Mentoring**

Peer mentoring is distinctly different from faculty mentoring. Peer mentoring relationships typically seek to improve student retention and transition into college life. Rodger and Tremblay (2003) noted peer mentoring typically seeks to improve student grades and

decrease students' nervousness about the academic rigors of college. Peer mentoring often involves a relationship where the mentor and mentee are similar in age, as opposed to faculty mentoring. Peer mentoring focuses on building a personal relationship or friendship rather than a professional relationship. Webb et al. (2009) suggested "Due to professional distance between students and faculty members, the definition of mentoring as friendship may be more applicable to relationships with peers rather than with faculty" (p. 1091). Peer mentors in higher education institutions have experienced growth from being mentors and this has led to peer mentors developing new skills and extending their networking opportunities with other students and faculty and staff members (Seery et al., 2021). Furthermore, Ehrich et al. (2002) suggested there are positive outcomes for peer mentors such as networking and the transmission of knowledge. Additionally, Jacobi (1991) suggested that student faculty mentoring follows an apprentice approach to the mentoring experience. Peer mentoring is distinctly different from faculty mentoring on the post-secondary level. Although student-faculty mentoring relationships exist on college campuses, they often have differentiated objectives than peer-to-peer mentoring relationships.

Faculty mentoring typically pairs students with faculty members for research opportunities. Johnson et al. (2007) suggested, "Student-faculty mentoring includes relationships between undergraduates and faculty members as well as those between graduate students and faculty members" (p. 16). Faculty mentoring has also become common in STEM fields and typically pairs students with faculty members from their academic field of study. Studies often cited in the literature have shown faculty mentoring potentially plays a significant role in influencing minority students' success in STEM fields and in graduate level education (Adams, 1992; Griffin et al., 2010; Patton & Harper, 2003; Patton, 2009; Tram et al., 2022). Also, studies

have shown that informal contact with faculty members impacts positive student outcomes (Jacobi, 1991; Pascarella, 1980). Additionally, Santos and Reigadas (2004) indicated formal faculty mentoring of students has been used to increase the number of underrepresented students. They also suggested “by and large these programs have tended to be under-funded and understaffed and provide few real incentives for faculty to want to participate in mentoring activities” (Santos & Reigadas, 2004, p. 354). In addition, formal faculty mentoring in higher education settings has been to guide faculty members and to provide professional development to faculty members. Faculty mentoring is complex and often wide ranging and dependent on organizational context and institutional culture (Zellers et al., 2008).

In faculty mentoring, a Sands et al. (1991) study found faculty mentoring is complex and multidimensional. Furthermore, the study identified four types of mentors on the faculty level: friend, career guide, information source, and an intellectual guide. Higher education institutions utilize faculty mentoring in a more specialized arrangement comparably to how the business world structures the practice. Kram (1983) studied and identified the phases of mentoring in a corporate organizational setting and concluded that there are two functional areas of mentoring—one mentoring model focuses on coaching, sponsorship, and exposure. The other, centered around role modeling, counseling, acceptance, and confirmation. Although mentoring is different in a business setting, it shares commonalities with peer mentoring and faculty mentoring in higher education. Kram and Isabella (1985) identified differences in the functions of mentoring for peers as opposed to faculty mentoring relationships. They stated that there are two distinct differences in peer mentoring from traditional mentoring.

First, in conventional mentoring relationships there are significant differences in age and in hierarchical levels, while in peer relationships one of these attributes is usually the

same for both individuals. Second, the clearest distinctions between mentoring and peer relationships are found in the functions provided and the quality of the exchange. While a few of the developmental functions of the two types of relationships overlap, mentoring relationships involve a one way helping dynamic while peer relationships involve a two-way exchange. (Kram & Isabella, 1985, p. 129)

The unique distinction of faculty mentoring versus peer mentoring relationships is hierarchical in power structure, experience, and in relationship value between the two individuals.

Faculty mentoring is distinctly different from peer mentoring in its purpose within higher education settings; however, they both share similar intended outcomes for growth. From a peer mentoring perspective, the objective is typically academic support, retention, persistence, and academic success. Conversely, faculty mentoring usually focuses on career application outcomes such as career advancement and organizational assimilation. Also, studies have shown that the definition of mentoring is often multifaceted and not clearly defined (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991; Merriam, 1983). Faculty-faculty mentoring is different than undergraduate peer mentoring and student-faculty mentoring. Student-faculty mentoring typically centers around the faculty member and the student having similar field specific interests. As evidenced in student faculty mentoring in STEM fields, faculty mentoring lacks the same components that peer mentoring experiences rely upon as a foundational pillar (Griffin et al., 2010; Jacobi, 1991; Johnson et al., 2007; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Sands et al., 1991; Santos & Reigadas, 2004). Faculty mentoring utilized with new faculty members typically lacks an emphasis on being a “role model” for the new faculty member as is essential with peer mentoring.

Faculty mentoring programs normally emphasize faculty development and job retention. Zeind et al. (2005) described the faculty mentoring experience as:

Both the mentor and protégé' exchange ideas and mutually benefit from each other's experiences. The mentor is devoted to the transformation of the protégé' into a fully integrated identity, separate from but equal to the mentor in the academic environment. The mentors efforts focus on the protégé's career advancement and on psychosocial functions directed at enhancing the protégé's sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role. (Zeind et al., 2005, p. 1)

Faculty mentoring is different from peer mentoring at the higher education level. Peer-to-peer mentoring relationships are fundamentally different than faculty mentoring relationships. Institutions often implement faculty mentoring programs at the faculty level between newly hired faculty and tenured faculty with the goal of improving faculty retention. Sands et al. (1991) suggested faculty members who reach a Ph.D. terminal degree are presumed to be capable of working autonomously without the level of support needed of a graduate student. However, there are instances where student-faculty mentoring programs are utilized to improve retention and persistence of at-risk or underrepresented populations. Further, student-faculty mentoring programs are built on relationships that have a hierarchical aspect that is fundamentally different from typical peer to peer mentoring relationships.

### **Summary**

Currently the literature largely focuses on the various problems Black men face in higher education institutions and at PWIs (Harper, 2015; Mills, 2020; Moore, 2019; Solorzano et al., 2000). Additionally, studies have focused on the graduation, retention, and persistence rates of Black men in higher education (Harper, 2009, Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Ottley, 2018; Ottley & Ellis, 2019; Palmer et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2008, 2016). Some studies have centered on Black Male Initiative programs that support Black men's success in academia (Brooms, 2022; Clark &



Brooms, 2018; Druery & Brooms, 2019). Studies have rarely specifically focused on Black male student perceptions and experiences of peer mentoring typically implemented in BMI initiatives at PWIs. Very little is known about how Black men's perceptions and experiences with peer mentoring in their first year influences their success at PWI's in a rural setting. This study sought to address a portion of the gap in current literature concerning this issue. This study also sought to contribute to the knowledge base of higher education administrators when implementing peer mentoring programs for Black men students in their first year. The following chapter discusses the methodology and research design used to guide the study. Additionally, the research questions, research setting, participants, data collection method, data analysis, and validity and trustworthiness procedures are outlined. Additionally, the coding process used to analyze the collected data is also explained.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

The study utilized mostly qualitative methods. “A research design is the plan of actions or structure which links the philosophical foundations and the methodological assumptions of a research approach to its research methods” (Gelo et al., 2008, p. 272). Qualitative research concentrates on how individuals or groups form meaning while seeking to provide descriptive data of the studied phenomenon (Gelo et al., 2008). Some of the advantages of conducting qualitative research are flexibility and how it can evolve during the research process. Additionally, qualitative research can provide rich knowledge of people’s feelings, actions, and thoughts. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated qualitative analysis “focuses on meaning in context, requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data” (p. 2). The methods utilized in conducting a qualitative study offer a wide variety of opportunities to use technology to collect data.

The most common data collection method is to interview the participants and record their responses. Opdenakker (2006) suggests face-to-face interviews are the most common. Face-to-face interviews typically offer the opportunity for organic responses from the participants. Opdenakker (2006) suggests “an advantage of this synchronous communication is that the answer of the interviewee is more spontaneous, without an extended reflection” (p. 3). The personal nature of qualitative research lends itself to encourage fluid responses by being flexible and posing open ended questions about the respondent’s beliefs and experiences. Patton (2015) hypothesized, “Qualitative inquiry means going into the field—into the real world of programs, organizations, neighborhoods, street corners—and getting close enough to the people and

circumstances there to capture what is happening” (p. 48). Additionally, qualitative research can be an informative research tool in capturing participants feelings, experiences, and perceptions of their world. Strategies utilized in qualitative data collection rely on personal experience from the participants and engagement from the researcher to further understand a phenomenon (Patton, 2015).

### **Theoretical Framework**

I chose to use a phenomenological approach to investigate Black men’s perceptions of their peer mentoring experience at a rural PWI. Also, I utilized the same approach to better understand how the peer mentors perceived their experiences as a mentor. Students were selected from the Saluki Success Initiative program, which has a policy of mandatory mentoring for each new student during their first year at SIUC. The SSI program implemented peer mentoring for new students in 2020.

### ***Phenomenology***

The dictionary describes a phenomenon as an observable fact or event (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Additionally, a phenomenon is referred to as “an object or aspect known through the senses rather than by thought or intuition” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). According to Wojnar and Swanson (2007), scholars Heidegger (1962) and Husserl (1970) pioneered the concept of phenomenology as a philosophy in qualitative research to understand human experiences. Moran (2000) described phenomenology as “a radical style of philosophizing with an emphasis on attempting to get to the truth of matters to describe a phenomenon.” Eberle (2014) described phenomenology “as an analysis of things themselves and the science of phenomena.” Zalta (2003) described phenomenology as “the practice of studying the appearance of things as they appear in our experience.” Zalta (2003) stated “phenomenology studies an individual’s

perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and social activity through a phenomenological construct called ‘intentionality.’ Husserl (1970) described *intentionality* as “how one experiences things in the world.” Phenomenology focuses on succinctly describing lived experiences through the lens of the individual, pursuant to capturing and re-counting the essence of their lived experiences.

Through the utilization of phenomenological strategies, I hoped to find the essence of the peer mentoring experience for the participants in the program and the students who served as mentors. When conducting a phenomenological study, the researcher suspends their own assumptions, beliefs, and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Groenewald (2004) asserted that when conducting phenomenological research, “The aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts” (p. 5). The methods used to conduct my research were interviews, and descriptive statistics of the selected students’ from the research site. Creswell (2014) suggested phenomenological research “identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study” (p. 244). Additionally, Bogdan and Biklen (2006) as well as Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested qualitative research seeks to understand why events happen, what happened and what those events would mean to individuals in the study.

This study used phenomenology to identify phenomena that specifically are unique to its participants through their lens of experience. The participants’ experience during their first year at a rural PWI is unique to them individually and the lens through which they view their experiences is a phenomenon that only they can describe. The essence of the participants experiences and their description of that experience is the basis of the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, using the phenomenological approach was the best

method to accurately describe the participants understanding of their experience.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was centered around Bandura's (1977) concept of *self-efficacy*. Self-efficacy describes an individual's confidence in their capability to perform the actions required to achieve distinctive performance results. It represents the assurance in one's capacity to have an impact on events and have control over their surroundings (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1977), a person's self-efficacy can serve as the basis for motivation, their state of well-being, and individual achievements. Furthermore, Bandura (1977) identified four primary sources that influence a person's self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Bandura (1997) states: "mastery experiences are the most influential source of efficacy information because they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed. Success builds a robust belief in one's personal efficacy." (p. 80). The second influence, vicarious experience, involves observing individuals who resemble oneself achieve success through persistent effort, which enhances the belief of others in their own capabilities to excel in similar activities and achieve success (Bandura, 1977). The third -- verbal persuasion -- pertains to the statements individuals make to others about their convictions concerning their abilities or limitations, and it has the potential to bolster or diminish others' confidence in their capabilities (Bandura, 1977). The fourth influence, physiological states, relates to an individual's emotional, physical, and psychological state that can impact a person's perception of their capabilities. Bandura (1977) describes the psychological state as arousal cognitively generated by stimulating a thought pattern. He emphasizes the intensity of a person's emotional and physical responses and how they are perceived ultimately influence their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Clauss-

Ehlers and Wibrowski (2007) found promoting educational resilience can be achieved through academic programs that incorporate a robust and continuous counseling element, addressing both academic and personal concerns in a supportive manner. Additionally, several scholars Brooms (2021), Cintron et al. (2020), Collins et al. (2017), Cuyjet (2006), Druery and Brooms (2019), Palmer et al. (2014) -- found creating support environments can contribute to Black men's success. Support environments in college supported by BMI initiatives like peer mentoring programs embrace the four aspects of Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. Bandura's self-efficacy framework served as this study's foundation for comprehending the cognitive and social elements that impact the retention of at-risk Black male students in their first year at a rural PWI during their peer mentoring experience; as well as the mentors they worked with. I used this framework to categorize the participants responses to the research questions concerning their perceptions and experiences.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What affect does peer mentoring have on at-risk Black men at rural PWI's?
2. What are at-risk Black male students' perceptions and experiences at a rural PWI?
3. What affect does peer mentoring at-risk Black men have on the peer mentor at a rural PWI?

### **Research Setting**

Southern Illinois Normal University, now SIUC was founded in 1869 in Carbondale Illinois (Southern Illinois University, 2022). The institution started as a one-building teacher's college with a small number of faculty members and an inaugural class of 143 students. The inaugural class also included two African American students. The institution was renamed

Southern Illinois University in 1947 to reflect the institution's increasing and far-reaching academic mission. SIUC is a research-intensive university; the institution is classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2021) as an R2 Doctoral University for its high research activity. Institutions considered R2 award at least 20 research or scholarship doctorates or award at least 30 professional practice doctorates across at least two programs. The campus is near the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and ten miles away from Giant City State Park and Lake Murphysboro State Park. Additionally, the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge and Shawnee National Forest are within miles of the campus and offer students a unique outdoor experience (Southern Illinois University, 2022).

The University operated largely as a teacher's college until 1948 when a new university president expanded and transformed the university to what it is today (Southern Illinois University, 2022). Over the next several years, the university added the law school, and the schools of medicine and dentistry and the institution experienced increased student growth for decades. In 1874, the university accepted its first Black students, two Black women, and in 1876 the first Black man, Alexander Lane, graduated from SIU. At the institution's peak in 1991, over 24,000 students were enrolled. As of this writing, according to the SIUC factbook, SIUC has a total enrollment of 11,366 total students and serves a student population that is roughly 28 percent minority. Also, SIUC ranks among the nation's top in awarding degrees to students from ethnic and racial minority groups (Southern Illinois University, 2022).

### **University Structure**

According to the 2022 SIU Interactive Fact Book, Southern Illinois University Carbondale is a state-funded institution with 11,366 current students, 50.3% male and 49.2% female. The institution serves 6,796 total full-time students, 8,299 undergraduate students full-

and part-time, as well as 3,067 professional and graduate students. The university is a diverse institution with 28% of students coming from an ethnic minority. Additionally, the institution serves students from 100 counties in Illinois, registers students from all 50 of the United States of America, and hosts students from 96 nations across the world (SIU Interactive Fact Book, 2022). The institution has a six-year graduation rate of roughly 45%. Well over half of the student population receives financial-need-based financial aid. SIUC offers over 200 majors, minors, and specializations to choose from and offers students over 300 registered student organizations in which to participate. According to the SIU undergraduate admissions webpage, the university offers a very diverse and wide range of programs (SIU Interactive Fact Book, 2022). Programs include aviation flight, automotive technology, engineering, education, architecture, chemistry, art & design, and forestry. SIUC also offers students the opportunity to work with faculty on research opportunities outside of the classroom. The institution also houses the Head Start program, Federal TRIO programs which includes eight programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. At SIUC, TRIO programs include Student Support Services and the McNair Scholars program (SIU Interactive Fact Book, 2022).

### **Demographics of SIUC**

The institution has experienced drastic enrollment declines in the past several years, from 2015 through 2022 (Rendfeld, 2021). Carbondale is the most diverse community in the Southern Illinois region because of the student population as well as the employees of SIUC. The city of Carbondale, which houses SIUC's main campus, has experienced steady population loss and business closures (Jacob, 2018). According to the SIU Interactive Fact Book (2022) database, SIUC is a predominantly White institution with 64.2% of students identifying as White; 13.7%



identifying as Black or African American; 8.5% Hispanic; 2.5% Asian; and 8.1% identifying as international or a non-resident of the United States. Since 2017, the institution has experienced student enrollment declines across all demographics. As of 2020, the total employee population included 3,793 full-time and part-time employees. The demographics of the part-time and full-time employees include 2,813 White, 280 Black, 119 Hispanic or Latino, 162 Asian, 14 American Indian or Alaska Native, 33 identifying as two or more races, and 372 are identified as nonresident alien employees (SIU Interactive Fact Book, 2022).

### **Participants**

The participants for this study came from the Office of Exploratory Student Advisement (ESA) which serves a diverse population of students (SIU Exploratory Student Advisement, n.d.). Students from remarkably diverse academic backgrounds from Chancellor Scholars students, undeclared and undecided students, provisional admits, and readmitted students are all served by ESA. The first-year retention rate for ESA student's is 54.76%. The office employs undergraduate peer mentors who serve students in the SSI program. The office consists of two different student population groups. One section of the office serves undecided and undeclared students. Students in the undeclared division are typically undecided about a major. Some students know what major they intend to pursue and are working on completing prerequisite courses for a selective admissions program. Students in the undeclared side of ESA receive optional peer mentoring from a graduate assistant. Conversely, the other side of the ESA office is the SSI (Saluki Success Initiative) program which assigns and requires an undergraduate peer mentor to each student (SIU Exploratory Student Advisement, n.d.).

### **Saluki Success Initiative**

The Saluki Success Initiative program is a program that serves a racially and ethnically

diverse population of students. The SSI program serves students who do not meet the regular admission standards of the university. The students selected for the SSI program are individually reviewed and provisionally admitted to the university. Students selected for the program have less than 26 previous college credits. Students selected for the program have varying high school GPA's; each student selected for the program falls below the 2.75 cumulative high school GPA required for general admission to the university. The provisionally admitted students sign a contract agreeing to participate in the SSI program. The Saluki Success Initiative program provides each student with an assigned peer mentor and requires academic coaching and tutoring through the campus tutoring center and an exclusive SSI specific new student seminar course called UNIV 101A. As well, students attend various skill building workshops throughout the semester. The workshops offer presentations on academic expectations, academic resources, financial literacy, campus engagement, career exploration, and leadership.

Students enroll only in courses approved by their academic advisor, attend a program kick-off meeting during the first week of the semester, attend mandatory meetings each week with their academic coach, tutor or mentor, and attend monthly meetings with their academic advisor. The SSI area of the office requires peer mentoring to all incoming first-year students in the program. Sixteen mentors work with a caseload of 10-20 students. Each mentor meets with students individually for weekly mentoring sessions. The program requires students to participate and stay in the program for at least two semesters. After completion of the program, good-standing students are eligible to officially declare their major. The students who complete the program but find themselves on academic probation at the end of their two semesters stay with the program until they are in good standing. The first-year retention rate from SSI students is 54.17%.

### **Black Men in Saluki Success Initiative**

Black male first-year students in the SSI program were selected to participate in the study strictly on a voluntary basis. The Black men in the study were provisionally admitted students at SIUC. Students selected for the program had less than 26 hours of previous college credit.

### **Peer Mentors**

Students who serve as peer mentors in the SSI program include sophomore, junior, and senior status students. The mentors come from a wide variety of demographic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Some students who serve as mentors were themselves provisionally admitted students in the SSI program and some students who entered the university under the normal admission standards serve as well. The selection criteria for serving as a mentor included a required minimum GPA of at least a 2.5 GPA on a 4.0 scale. Additionally, students who serve as mentors commit to serving as a mentor with the SSI program for at least two semesters, which include Fall and Spring semesters.

### **Data Collection**

Participants in the study were at-risk Black men at SIUC in the SSI program and students who participated as peer mentors. The mentee population are students provisionally admitted in the Saluki Success Initiative program. Additionally, the mentors were students enrolled at SIUC and employed as mentors for the SSI program. The study utilized individual one-on-one interviews of the mentors and mentees and collected student perceptions and experiences of their peer mentoring experience. The face-to-face, structured interviews collected the mentor and mentee responses to specific questions about their peer mentoring experience. The interviews were video and audiotaped, transcribed, and coded to protect the participants' identities and to help simplify the analysis of the data.

### **Data Analysis**

I transcribed the data using Otter.ai software to document an accurate account of the interview responses. I then numbered the participants and assigned the participants pseudonyms to protect the participants identities. I reviewed each transcript, and I utilized line-by-line coding to analyze the data. I identified themes, repetitive words, common phrases, and patterns in the participants responses to the structured interview questions. I utilized structural coding to categorize the participant responses to the interview questions. I then utilized NVivo software to create containers for each category and each component of my conceptual framework.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

To combat my own biases while conducting the study I used a strategy Morrow (2005) recognized and expressed as “One tradition that has become a standard in qualitative research is that of making one’s implicit assumptions and biases overt to self and others” (p. 254). To ensure the validity of the study, I utilized multiple strategies to collect the data including video and audiotaped structured interviews, follow-up questions, and member checking for accuracy during and after data collection. “Member checking covers a range of activities including: returning the interview transcript to participants; a member check interview using the interview transcript data or interpreted data” (Brit et al., 2016, p. 6). Morrow (2005) also suggested “In order to deal with biases and assumptions that come from their own life experiences or in interactions with research participants, which are often emotion laden, qualitative researchers attempt to approach their endeavor reflexively” (p. 254). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001) “reflexivity is rigorous self-scrutiny by the researcher throughout the entire research process” (p. 411). Being cognizant of my inherent biases and documenting each step throughout the research process was critical to the study’s validity and trustworthiness of the data collected.

I conducted a self-reflection after each interview to check my own bias and subjectivity. To protect and ensure the trustworthiness of the data, I used member-checking to check for accuracy of the accounts given by the participants and descriptive statistics using student GPA data to determine the academic impact of their experiences. I interviewed students initially and member-checked their responses to the interview questions. To ensure the trustworthiness of my research process, I coded the participants' responses to protect their confidentiality. I stored the coded information in a safe and secure location in adherence with IRB standards. More information on my coding process appears in Chapter Four.

### **Summary**

This chapter explained the methodology and research design of the study. Also, the research questions and research setting were described. I chose phenomenology to conduct this study to capture the essence of the peer mentoring experience for the participants. Furthermore, this chapter also outlined the university structure and demographics and the selection standards for participants. In addition, this chapter also included data collection methods, and validity and trustworthiness issues to address my inherent bias. Building upon this information, the next chapter presents the participant responses to the research questions.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to focus on three areas to gain a better understanding of at-risk Black men's retention, and peer mentoring at a rural PWI and the experiences of the peer mentors. In this chapter, I present the research findings from the structured interviews which collected the mentor and mentee responses to specific interview questions about their peer mentoring experience. The study utilized individual one-on-one interviews with the mentors and mentees that collected student perceptions and experiences of their peer mentoring experience. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews collected responses from the mentors and mentees to specific questions about their peer mentoring experience. I video and audiotaped, transcribed, and coded the interviews using pseudonyms to protect the participants identities and to help simplify the analysis. Subsequently, in this chapter, I describe the research participants demographic information and present the findings from the interviews.

In this study, I employed coding techniques outlined in Saldaña's (2009) book, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, to systematically analyze and categorize the qualitative data. I utilized line-by-line coding to analyze the data and I utilized structural coding to categorize the participant responses to the questions into topics. I then analyzed the data using NVivo software. Furthermore, I codified my data and utilized descriptive coding to separate my participant responses into categories that addressed my research questions. Moreover, I separated the topics generated from the structural coding process from the conceptual framework utilized within NVivo to create containers for each component to account for my conceptual framework to link the participant responses to Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy conceptual framework of

mastery experiences, physiological states, verbal persuasion, and vicarious experience. I used this framework to categorize participants responses to the interview questions.

### **Summary of Participants**

The 12 participants interviewed came from the SSI program. Of the 12 participants, four were peer mentors who mentored Black men SSI students in their first year. The remaining eight participants were mentees in the program in their first year at the institution, with one student serving in both roles. As shown in Table 1, the demographic characteristics of the 12 participants are outlined as well as their role in the program. Table 1 reflects the participants' profiles, gender, demographic information, and their role in the peer mentoring program. Four of the participants served as mentors and one of the participants served a dual role as first a mentee in the program then as a mentor the following year. Also, the remaining participants were mentees in the program during their first year.

**Table 1***Peer Mentoring Participants Demographic Data and Role*

Name	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Role
Aaliyah	Female	Black	Mentor
Jason	Male	Black	Mentee
Jermaine	Male	Black	Mentee
Chris	Male	Black	Mentee & Mentor
Tim	Male	Black	Mentee
James	Male	Latino	Mentor
Stephen	Male	Black	Mentee
Desmon	Male	Black	Mentee
Daniel	Male	Black	Mentee
Kevin	Male	Black	Mentee
Rudy	Male	Latino	Mentor
Byron	Male	Black	Mentee

**Themes for Mentees**

Table 2 illustrates the connections between the three themes that materialized and displays the interview questions connected to those themes. The following text represents the mentees' responses categorized into the themes.

**Table 2***Themes Derived from Interview Questions for Mentees*

Themes for Mentees	Interview Questions
First-Year Perceptions and Experiences	Describe your perceptions and experiences in your first year at this institution?
Impact of Peer Mentoring on Mentee	Describe how peer mentoring impacted your perceptions and experience at this institution?
Impact of Peer Mentoring on First-Year Success or Failure	Describe in detail how peer mentoring affected your success or failure in your first year of college?

As reflected in Table 2, I asked the mentees the following three interview questions. 1. Describe your perceptions and experiences in your first year at this institution? 2. Describe how



peer mentoring impacted your perceptions and experience at this institution? 3. Describe in detail how peer mentoring affected your success or failure in your first year of college? Furthermore, participant responses to the interview questions were grouped into categories dependent on their role as a mentor or a mentee. Three separate sets of themes emerged from the data. I identified themes and patterns in the participants responses to address my research questions. To start, I provide a demographic summary of the participants interviewed and present my findings to address my research questions. Three themes developed from the data for mentee's: First-year perceptions and experiences; Impact of peer mentoring on mentee; and Impact of peer mentoring on first-year success or failure. These three themes serve as a roadmap in analyzing the data from the nine participants who participated in the study who were mentees. The following findings present participant responses categorized into themes.

### **First-Year Perceptions and Experiences**

Participants in the study had varied responses about their first-year experience at the institution. Several mentioned both favorable and negative experiences as well as challenges adjusting to their new surroundings and college life. The experiences of the participants were diverse and included everything from challenges and uncertainty to positive shifts, enduring friendships, and the importance of support systems when navigating a university environment.

Kevin expressed, "being at the institution it taught me a lot, especially in the summertime me coming from where I'm coming from. I didn't really care about school at all. I just wanted to have fun all day." Additionally, he stated, "I came here in the summertime met new people. It was a good program. It gave me a fresh start on college. It taught me a lot. Being on my own." Furthermore, he expressed difficulty in getting acclimated to college life, sharing:

My first year, my full first semester, it was kind of hard because I wanted to have fun

still, I was still breaking into becoming a man and being on my own and having English four-page essays. It was pretty hard.

And “It was hard my first semester going through a lot. I lost my God momma, months before, it was getting very hard. I ain't want to come to school at all. My brain was gone.” Kevin concluded their description with “it taught me a lot to be on my own. And focus on my education and be a man about it.” Kevin’ response demonstrates that his first semester was a tumultuous time in his life, and he had difficulty navigating being away from home as a student and being independent.

Byron stated:

Definitely a lot of good experiences I feel like I met people that are going to be lifelong friends and at first I used to hear that I didn't believe that cause I'm just now meeting these people but when you are going through the same struggle that so many people that you meet here whether that's ... not having the financial ability to take care of yourself or you know, just stuff like that seeing as we all live together, we're all you know, boy and girl group meeting when we're all in the same situation. So people I've met in situations we've been through together, It definitely made me feel like I've met lifelong friends.

Definitely the experience of college also allowed me to really figure out who I am and what I want to do, and it helped me find purpose. My purpose in all type of areas.

Byron described his experience struggling with taking on the responsibilities of taking care of himself, finding new friends, and finding his purpose in his new environment.

Jason shared:

I didn't really have a bad experience, my first year. I came down here not really knowing anyone, I didn't really I have no friends that came down here. No family or anything like

that. So being a part of the program, and meeting a mentor, he was kind of like my I wouldn't say chaperone, but in a way he kind of did guide me through my first year here at SIU, he pretty much showed me a lot of things that I wouldn't have found on my own, like the Black Student Union. He showed me a lot about the black orgs out here. He was pretty much just like, the big helping hand.

Jason continued, declaring:

I really appreciated him because he was, I believe he was a junior at the time. And he knew a lot more about the resources that were able to help me on campus he was able to point me to who I needed to talk to where I needed help with bursar funding. He told me about a pantry that we had, and I would have never found out without him pretty much just helping me, with being able to communicate effectively to my teachers and things like that, because me personally, I was just like, my teachers not gone understand this, so I'm not really going to try, but he helped me figure out how to talk to them.

The participants shared diverse first-year experiences with positive moments and challenges, Kevin referenced how the program impacted his focus and independence, Byron emphasized the value of creating lifelong bonds, and Jason credited his mentor with guiding him to resources and through his college transition.

Jermaine articulated his experience was different from other students he encountered, stating:

My first year at this institution, it was kind of hard for me because I'm first generation. And nobody I knew went to college, especially Black people, no Black people I knew went to college, so it was kind of hard. A lot of questions couldn't nobody answer for me. I didn't know how to navigate college until I was thrown into the collegiate world, I

guess. It was hard.

He continued by stating:

For me, class wasn't difficult, it was the things outside of class, it's like, okay, how do I get my bursar bill paid, both my parents are trying to take care of me in college? And that's also trying to take care of my siblings too, then how do I try to have money for myself? And buy books and soap and tissue, the essential things I need. So those things outside the classroom that were hard, and I had to find help, I had to find those resources, and I found them later in the semester, per se instead of the beginning when I first got here. So, trying to find those was a little hard.

Jermaine also expressed some positive sentiments he encountered from being a first-generation college student, stating:

Before I got here, it was just like, oh, I'm going to go to college. But then when I got here, it's like, "oh, you're first generation," they get so happy, so excited for you, because they see that you're trying to do something to better your life, so they give you, a lot of these resources to go to, to get help.

Jermaine offered a unique perspective in explaining his challenges as a first-generation college student navigating new aspects of his life as a student in a new environment including financial responsibilities, finding resources, and asking for help. Additionally, Chris credited his summer program experience as a contributor to his perceptions of the institution. Chris shared his initial perceptions of the institution saying:

When I first heard of Southern Illinois, I heard it was a predominantly White school. So, I was kind of scared to attend. But then I heard about the summer program. And it was mentors who made me feel comfortable and welcome. So that was a great experience

getting to know them. And they made me feel involved on campus.

Tim explained his perceptions by describing his thought process before coming to the institution saying “I remember when I was on my way driving here from Washington to here. And my mom was talking to me. She kept saying that Southern Illinois University sounds like such a White school.” Furthermore, Tim described his perception and experience:

When we got here, and especially when I got to Neely hall, there were a lot more Black people than I thought there were going to be. And it made me feel a lot more comfortable than I would have if there weren't as many. And plus, my entire floor is pretty much all Black people, they're only maybe two or three White people. And it being my first year here definitely has opened my horizons to a lot of things. I've met a lot of new people, a lot of new interesting people, I've been able to participate in a lot of interesting things that I would have never participated in if I hadn't come here.

Tim continued:

It's a very inclusive school I like all the things that are happening here. Personally, I haven't experienced any like, anyone, disrespecting me, or just putting me down or not including me in something, for any reason, really. But also, it's kind of is due to my personality to being a likable person in general, and I'm kind of open. I've met a lot of people. I've seen a lot of people who I thought would think one way and they think a different way. And then vice versa, you know. So far, my experience on this campus has been overwhelmingly positive. Because moving from Washington State all the way to Illinois, there aren't a lot of people that you know, that are going to come with you on that journey.

Tim expressed relief upon discovering an environment that was contrary to his initial

perceptions, he was relieved to find a diverse community which contributed to his positive experience. He credited his openness as a student as a contributing factor to his positive transition to the institution.

Stephen shared he did not have any initial perceptions, however, he acknowledged there was an adjustment he had to make to the environment.

I wouldn't say I necessarily had any perceptions at least before, of course, coming in during the summer, and taking a couple classes and kind of getting used to the college feel. But even then, I still didn't really know what to expect. But after, I'd say the fourth or fifth week, I kind of started to understand like, okay, college is a little more rigorous than I thought, but it's not something that I can't handle. But that, of course, is dependent on I'd say that's more so dependent on my mindset at the time, depending if I were to not have as much motivation. Or if I were to not understand something, there were times where I was like, I could ask for help. But there was an underlying hesitance because I'm like, I don't want to seem like I don't get it, because I kind of get it. But those aside, I think that my experience here has been eye opening. More so in understanding how it'll be beneficial for me to continue here, and how I need to operate and what I need to think like.

Stephen shared he lacked an initial perception of the institution, however, he acknowledged there was an adjustment from the summer that required him to change his mindset and face hesitance to ask for help to navigate the rigors of college life.

Desmon stated that his first-year experience was impacted by starting in the summer, sharing:

I came in, during the future Scholars Program, which helped me get into the school. That

month of summer helped me because I was having fun all summer that month helped me get grounded. And really just getting back into school and having a connection with 40 some kids also in the same situation as me, along with having mentors who are working on campus that I was able to talk to, that really helped but then when I moved into my freshman year, also, I met my advisor and it was like the same thing, I had the same connections I had along with the people who did the future scholars.

Desmon continued sharing that in his first year he had a “network of people to talk to if I ever had problems.” The participant further explained:

My mentor texts and calls me a few times a month just to check in, say how I'm doing check in on grades ask how's everything's going, asks how I'm adjusting in college and kind of really kept me grounded because I felt like if I was going through it by myself. I would have struggled and I'm not the type of person to really go out and ask for help.

Desmon shared how the experience of the Future Scholars Program helped facilitate a smooth transition for him by establishing a continuing connection with his mentor whom he relied upon during his first-year experience.

Daniel explained his experience stating:

I thought it was just going to be like, I don't know, it was kind of awkward cause I didn't expect to see too many people who look like me. Coming to a PWI. I didn't know how I would mesh well, or get along with everybody here. First when I got here, I was kind of closed off. Coming from where I come from. I'm not really. I'm not generally a people person or I don't like go out my way to speak to people I like stay to myself a little bit.

But everyone, for the most part was cool. Even the people that didn't look like me.

Additionally, Daniel clarified his response by adding, “what I mean by that, it's like I come from

Chicago Illinois.” Daniel expressed by that he meant that where he is from people can seem “standoffish but not hostile” and coming to college he had to adapt his standard social posture in a new environment. Daniel continued by stating he “did not grow up socializing with a lot of White people.” He expressed anxiety with not knowing what to expect and adjusting to socializing with people that did not look like him. Daniel described that in his unique perspective given his background he felt more at ease communicating around people he could identify with. Initially, his perception of the environment in addition to his lived experiences of not interacting with individuals from different racial backgrounds made him apprehensive to communicate with others because that was the cultural norm where he was from; however, given his new environment as a first-year student, he was compelled to adapt.

### **Impact of Peer Mentoring on Mentee**

Participants in the study had positive descriptions about peer mentoring and how it impacted them in their first year. In general, several participants shared their positive experiences with peer mentoring, emphasizing the mentors' encouragement, relatability, and help with social and academic integration. While some participants highlighted the significance of having similar experiences, others valued the mentors assistance in forming relationships and offering helpful resources.

Kevin expressed how he developed a strong relationship like a big brother with his mentor which started in the summer and continued throughout his first year which significantly impacted him. Kevin stated:

My peer mentor, he was, he a great dude and I looked at him like a big brother, we started working together at Walmart. He became a big brother to me; I can always call to help with my work. Even in summertime the peer mentor program. They assigned me right to



him. He's the perfect dude, I could joke with him. Be serious with him. He helped with my work he does everything. That's really my guy, that's really my man I can call him for work, anything with school or even to talk to him even when I need somebody to talk to me. I really thank him for being my mentor.

Additionally, Kevin shared an experience of his peer mentoring reaching out to him weekly to check in. One week they did not respond because he had been partying a lot and not attending classes. Subsequently, Kevin shared his experience once he finally spoke with his peer mentor stating the peer mentor gave him words of encouragement.

You got to get your work done. You here for one reason. You can't be outside having fun all day and not think you're going to do no work. And then it just gave me like a motivation like, "ah yeah, that's somebody who believed in me down here." I could trust him. Then we started working together, we grew a bond and he'll still keep in contact with me even at work he'll ask me how class going and everything, that's a real big brother moment because nobody really check on you down here. You don't got nobody to talk to. He always checked up on me and I liked it. That's a real mentor right there.

Kevin suggested having a peer encourage him and motivate him to persevere through his struggles impacted his success in his first-year experience.

Additionally, Byron had similar positive statements about the impact of his experience in his first year, stating:

The peer experience it gave me especially very early on in the school year when I did have my first meeting with my mentor it allowed me to know that it's people that look like me especially at that time like another person that looks like me from almost the same area that I'm from going through the same stuff just trying to survive in college. It

definitely made me relax more and told me that I could do this, or you know, like somebody else did it so I know that somebody looks like me and we're in the same situation we were at a PWI, and I don't know, like somebody else's did what I did if that makes sense.

Byron continued by stating that:

It felt good, like it was just a good feeling, it was cause as soon as I seen my mentor and started to talk, like okay, I can do this, I can actually talk to him. I can actually talk to him he is going to be able to understand what I'm going through. They can relate to me like let's say especially with my mentor I could have got another mentor, it could have been a male or woman but my mentor literally, we had the same type of hairstyle at that time, like I used to have. I used to have locks, I mean, we both had locks, we were talking, and I found out where he was from and found out where they were from. And ended up, our family from that area, where my mentor is from, I have family from the area like exactly where they went to school and everything I knew, their environment. So, the conversation felt like I already knew them or, you know, they were easy to relate, they knew what I was talking about. I never had to explain the situation or why, I felt like that they could automatically okay, I've been here before. I know how you feel I know exactly what you're talking about, right, and this is how, you know, this is a solution to that.

Byron conveyed that the experience in his first year created a comfortable environment for him to be more open and communicate with someone he identified with on a personal and life experience level. The mentors ability to intuitively characterize Byron's feelings and offer solutions without prolonged explanations enhanced the effectiveness of their relationship.

Jason stated he was apprehensive about his peer mentoring experience at first, explaining

he initially had concerns about finding people he could relate to.

At first, I was just like, oh, there's no Black kids at my school, but I'm not going to really find any Black kids that are not whitewashed, or any Black kids that come from the same type of setting that I come from, everybody's going to pretty much be like, I don't want to handle him because, he might be too ghetto or something like that. I would just feel like I was going to be an outcast. But I found people just like me, they came from the same type of areas that I came from, they kind of come from, we all come from different backgrounds, but they kind of have the same type of background in a way like its different, but it's still the same. I don't know how to explain that. Yeah, my mentor, he was pretty much able to just help me find people that I really just connect.

Jason initially had some consternation about what he would experience when he arrived on campus; however, his mentor experience impacted his ability to navigate his way toward peers that he shared commonalities with and eased his assimilation in his first year.

Jermaine stated the peer mentoring experience impacted him saying:

Really helped me broaden my horizon because it gave me somebody to talk to, to ask those questions, and help set goals because if I was doing this by myself, I probably wouldn't ever set goals, I probably would've just did a mediocre job. But having somebody that's been here that looks like me that came from where I came from, it was easy for me to talk to them and ask them questions, and they can help me find resources to help.

Moreover, Jermaine shared his experience in transitioning from high school online instruction to college in-person instruction, sharing that “being back in school, some of the classes were a little difficult for me to understand and grasp.” Additionally, Jermaine shared his peer mentor helped

him find resources on campus which impacted his experience, stating:

I didn't know that the school had a tutoring center. And my mentor mentioned to me, "Oh, we have a tutoring center it's open these days, these days. And you can go get help with your homework, we help with classwork we help with assignments." And so, it was kind of toward like the mid midway mark, and I wasn't really failing, but I wasn't doing a good job. So, after I found that resource that my peer mentor gave me, I start using that and I ended up passing the class.

Chris explained his peer mentor impacted his experience and allowed him to "open up" and adjust, stating:

Peer Mentoring gave me someone to reach out to me and check on me. If I didn't have that, I would kind of feel all alone. My parents, they text once in a while, but it's, I can't fully open up to them and discuss how school is going. So having that mentor to reach out and motivate me, that pushed me to do better, having study sessions.

Tim also expressed the experience "definitely helped with my time management, and it just helped me in general, just go from being a high schooler to a college student, like make the transition a lot smoother." He added:

I think that a peer mentor is definitely a must for students like myself, who struggled in high school, just turning in work in general, or doing any of the school things and then moving on to the higher level, where there's no teachers to push you into the direction to turn in your work. I definitely think a peer mentor helped me personally. It helped with my time management, helped with me turning in work on time, and helped with me just being more active in the community of SIUC, and just not feeling left out and it also just kind of helped me gauge how people I guess, like react in this certain area to certain

things.

Tim continued to share that being around his mentor allowed him to pick up on how they interacted with other people and then allowed them to self-reflect on how they themselves interacted with other people, and it allowed him to make more friends and build more connections and be open to new ideas which impacted his experience.

Stephen expressed indifference with the impact of his peer mentoring experience stating “peer mentoring was, okay, I don't really have any good nor bad things about it.” Stephen added, “there was really nothing to write home about peer mentoring. There were a couple of times where I got tidbits of information was like, okay, like, that's pretty impactful.” He shared indifference toward his peer mentor repeatedly asking if “I needed help.” Moreover, he conveyed he felt hesitant to be vulnerable with his mentor stating:

I do think it's much harder for especially a new student, especially someone you may or may not know, to open up enough to explain how you feel mentally, emotionally, etc.

Because that is quite personal. Even if the mentors trying to take steps to opening up that door, it is reliant on the mentee to feel vulnerable. But I'd say that's why I felt indifferent to it because I personally have an issue with opening up to people, especially people. It takes me a while to get to a point where I feel comfortable to just talk about things. But I think that it's beneficial if given to the right person. But if given to a person like me that feels indifferent towards it, I don't believe that it will greatly impact them especially those that seem more introverted and or closed off.

Stephens struggles with opening up and how being emotionally vulnerable to his mentor impacted his experience; however, he felt that had he been at a different space mentally he could have benefitted from the experience.

Desmon said his mentor “helped me stay focused on schoolwork, he alerted me to school events, which is a big help” adding, “he'd just kept me posted and things happening around school, kept me interested. Just helped me. Kept me connect with everything going around me.” He also stated he “felt like I just had like a step up and somebody in my corner helping me I had somebody to like I said, keep me on track just keep me posted.” Desmon also expressed the feeling his peer mentoring experience impacted his sense of belonging, stating, “I wasn't going through it alone. Being five hours away from home, I don't even know how to describe it, it was just somebody to help me and somebody to help me stay on track.” Furthermore, Desmon added:

Since he was in the same position as me, and I saw his success, I was like if I do this, I can end up just like him being successful and end up graduating college. Having somebody that's been in the same situation as me and is a successful person advising and telling me what to do really helped.

Desmon felt observing a successful peer impacted his experience positively and gave him an example to follow in his first year.

Daniel shared similar sentiments as other participants, sharing how “peer mentoring, it affected my perception, it helped me a little bit like with my mentor, being someone that I can say look like me.” Daniel continued asserting having a peer mentor helped him meet friends and get out of his comfort zone, stating:

Not really seeing too many people like myself all the time or having to socialize outside of getting out of my comfort zone. He helped that perception and my experience with the peer mentorship. It was good for the most part anytime I needed something he was there to answer questions for me. And he was able to help me, and he was always able to explain things to a point where I can always understand he was always reachable he was

nowhere like, he'd never be incognito, anytime I called or texted he was always there. He also expressed his mentor impacted him and guided him to resources and “spaces that I will feel comfortable.” Daniel also expressed how being a first-generation college student impacted his peer mentoring experience, saying:

A lot of time my parents for them, they don't really understand the struggles that a college student will go through cause they never did it. So, it's like they'll never really understand it's so like, when you have someone you can reach out to socially like your mentor, like takes the relief out like someone that you can talk to, vent to, and they can get it, they understand it. So that's a kind of experience that was good for me because I wasn't used to getting someone to talk to that understand me and could actually help me.

For Daniel, having the ability to reach out to someone socially like a mentor alleviated the anxiety of being a first-generation college student in a new environment. It provided an outlet for him to socialize with someone who could understand his unique struggles as a first-generation college student. His mentor offered him a supportive person in his life that he was not accustomed to before in his life.

### **Impact of Peer Mentoring on First-Year Success or Failure**

Most participants expressed a beneficial influence of peer mentoring on their first-year success, attributing their success in college to the guidance, support, and motivation provided by their peer mentors. One participant expressed uncertainty regarding the impact of peer mentoring on their success in college. While they did not directly attribute their success to mentoring, they acknowledged the relief of having someone available for support.

Kevin articulated how his peer mentoring experience impacted his success by helping him stay on track. He cited the previous experiences his mentor had as contributing toward him

trusting his peer mentors advice. He shared he took heed to his mentors advice because he recognized he was new to the experience and his mentor had previous experiences that could help guide him to avoid pitfalls in his first year stating, “he was already in the program before me. So, it's like it gave me like a pedestal like, he tells me what to do.” He added,

I had my fun I still got up and did my work. And I thank my mentor for that because he always checked up on me no matter what time, one in the morning, I call him and I need help with this. And he'll make sure he was like, okay, I'm going to help you.

Kevin summed up his experience stating how his peer mentor impacted his life so far and continued to impact his success and decision making, stating:

He taught me a lot, he brought a lot of success to me, with everything from work to talking when I need help, when I need to get in contact with my counselor, he'd be my second man to go to. He a good guy. I hope he bring more positive vibes to everybody else. I recommend he be anybody mentor. Especially a kid that really didn't have no hope in college. I didn't hope to come to college. I didn't want to come to college. I wanted to have fun all day. My whole life changed because of this. My parents look at me different. Everybody looking at me different. I'm just thankful for this. I'm just happy I'm making my God mom proud. Thankful for college because being in Chicago, me being at this age and, it's a way out. It's dangerous. People dying every day. My friends locked up facing charges everybody dying isn't a way out in Chicago. There's no way. There's no way you could be the positive, most positive man, you still go home for a weekend, something bad could happen anytime. That's why I'm happy I came down here, I'm really thankful for the program thankful for everybody. Always looking out for me.

Kevin explained his mentoring experience greatly impacted his success in his first year. He



expressed his mentor changed his perspective on education but also positively impacted his life.

Byron described mentoring as impacting his first-year success by saying:

It made me want to actually do my work. Especially with my mentor. Like I see my mentor a lot around the campus. And they usually busy a lot, so when we did find time to talk, he always made sure I was on top of my work. Always making sure like if I was going through something, they'll be there to talk to me and helped me get through that situation. Like I said, I've seen them run around campus I still see them to this day they still ask me how I'm doing they still find time to call and checkup.

Byron added that the experience contributed to his desire to be successful in his first-year, sharing that it:

Prepared me and allow me to want to be successful and wanted every time they did ask me how I'm doing or am I on top of my work and it made me want to give them a good response.

Byron continued, stating how his peer mentor impacted his success on an English assignment by linking them with appropriate campus resources.

I ended up taking their advice I did go to the writing center, I did use the resources in the writing center, and I end up getting a passing grade on it so that definitely, that situation right there definitely like allowed me to know, okay, that there's people actually care about my success.

He expressed not knowing about the resource on campus until his peer mentor told him about it.

Jason shared the peer mentoring experience did not affect his failure; however he felt that it did impact his success, stating:

He was able to help me learn how to communicate to my professors effectively on things

like late work, he was able to help me essentially just maneuver and navigate the campus. Do my classes properly, being able to get out of the childish mindset, just overall mature and make sure that I understand. I'm here to do my work, not just fool around.

Jason also expressed his peer mentor helped him in his second semester deal with mental health struggles concerning sensitive issues back home. Jason stated:

The second semester, of my freshman year, I was really depressed. I was skipping class; I had a lot of things going on at home that were affecting my mental out here. My family didn't really understand that. But my mentor did he was pretty much telling me you know, you can't really focus on the things at home, like you can think about it, but you can't really focus on it because you're not at home to really do anything about it anyways, I was falling behind on my late work. I wasn't able to get my books on time because I didn't have the money for that my mentor was able to help me get my books.

In addition, Jason indicated his peer mentor helped him communicate with his instructors explaining his situation and he was able to catch up on the work he missed because of not having his books. He felt this helped with communication and was key to his first-year success.

Another participant in the study felt his mentor impacted his success in his first year by providing guidance and goal setting which encouraged him to persist through difficulties.

Jermaine stated:

I think peer mentoring really helped me with my success because like I said, If I didn't have nobody there helping me create goals and create things that they know that somebody will need to be successful as a first-year student. I don't think I would have been successful as I am. Nor do I think I would have come back to college because I was just doing this on my own. I would of just say oh, okay, I can't do it no more, let me go.

But the peer mentor like really helped me and push me like, no, you want to stay here.

You want to finish the degree you already started and it's going to be all right, like, I been through the same things you been through, you are going through, it's going to be okay.

And here's things to help you.

He continued to say when he first started his college experience he felt like “my voice wasn’t being heard” and he didn’t understand. He stated he was not doing well academically until he felt someone understood his experience, summing it up by saying “it was kind of hard because, didn't nobody understand what I was going through until. Like I met people that actually was first-generation as well like they understand, and they know how to help you better.” The experience of having a peer mentor in his first year impacted Jermaine positively and provided the support he needed to continue his education.

Chris expressed how he felt peer mentoring was a successful first year experience for him because his peer mentor organized study sessions and consistently communicated with them through texts.

She'll reach out once a week, twice a week. Make sure I'm staying on top of my work, and she'll text me like, I heard you're doing good in this class. I heard you're dropping this class, what's going on? So, she'll just try and stay on top of me and my work.

Tim conveyed his response to how his peer mentor impacted his first-year success by describing an experience where his peer mentor helped him in his first semester, stating:

I remember my first semester, I almost failed psychology 102. Because I just was not like, I understood what I was learning. I just didn't have the energy to actually do the work right. But my peer mentor, she stepped in, I remember telling her that like that's the one class I'm struggling in out of all my other classes, and she stepped in and helped me

by just kind of like, pushing me to stay on track.

Tim continued to share how much his peer mentoring experience impacted his first-year success, stating:

I know for a fact that if I, if my mentor didn't do what she did, I would not have passed psychology, and I probably wouldn't be going to the school next semester, I'd probably be going back home or joining the military. But because of her, I'm able to continue going here, and I'm able to continue my education and do what I want to do with my life.

One of the participants in the study, Stephen, expressed indifference with the characterization that his peer mentoring experience had an impact on his success or failure. Stephen expressed mixed feelings about peer mentoring impacting his success, stating:

I wouldn't say that peer mentoring necessarily made me successful, because any time in which I work to put in effort and I saw the fruits of my effort through higher grades, or even sometimes lower grades, depending on what I'm doing, it was more so off of things that I've come to terms with and learned about myself through just trying to understand how to be a college student. So, I wouldn't say that I benefited from it. And it didn't make me necessarily successful. But it didn't not make me successful if that makes sense.

Stephen continued to explain his experience stating:

On the other hand, at least knowing that there was someone that was either a call away or an email away to be like, "Hey, if you really need it, like here's this and that I can help you" that made things feel better when there were times in my classes where I was really low. Now, if I use the opportunity or not is a different question. But it felt relieving to know that I wasn't alone in struggling, especially when you have a mentor who can relate to you on some aspect of struggling in a class or multiple classes. So, while I can't say, I

benefited from it. And it made me successful. It also didn't discourage my success.

Stephen acknowledged that having someone there if needed did provide a sense of security for him during his first year. However, he felt it did not impact his success or failure in his first year.

Furthermore, Stephen concluded his remarks by saying:

For me, at least in regards of trying to be successful. In relation to peer mentoring, it was very hard to adapt to at first. But the more I kept at it, and the more I did talk with my mentor, I was like, okay, I kind of get it. And then there were some opportunities, which I did take I did learn a couple of tricks of the trade, which I will probably have to do in the next like two weeks. But I'd say it made things easier. Or at least it made things feel easier on me, because it was taking a bit of the mystery of being a college student off my shoulders, talking to a student that has been here for a couple of years. And of course, they have more life experience. And I guess just that one-on-one environment did benefit me because that helped me understand a little bit more. Not necessarily on how I needed to be as a student, but how I needed to adapt as a person to then be a student.

Stephen acknowledged it was difficult to adapt to the relationship; however, he did learn valuable “tricks of the trade” from his mentor to make things easier for him as a person and as a college student.

Desmon indicated “Peer mentoring, it helped my success and my so far years of college because I know he went to college, he's going through the same thing.” Adding his mentor “showed me what was really important in college. And when you can have fun, and when it was time to really buckle down.” He further added his mentor made a guide based on his academic responsibilities and helped him stay focused.

I feel like without that I would have been on my own just sinking and nobody would have

known cause I wouldn't have said anything, but it was nice to have somebody reach out and offered to help me. I enjoyed that.

Daniel stated his peer mentor affected his success because of their previous experience being a student themselves. He shared, “him already been in my shoes before being a freshman, he was able to like kind of stop me from growing up making the same mistakes that he probably made or that he saw.” Daniel categorized his experience saying:

It was like sort of like a big brother sort of experience like me being a first-generation college student. It's no one else I can really talk to like about certain things. So, I can talk to him and he'll get it so he's like, oh, yeah I already know how that is or he'll be able to guide me, give me advice that work for him so I can try and apply it to my everyday life.

And that's how it was like a big brother thing.

Daniel had a peer mentoring experience that impacted his first-year success which resembled a supportive big brother type connection, which provided him with assistance and support being a first-generation college student. Given the participants responses, mentors played a crucial role in offering guidance, support, and motivation for students which impacted their first-year experiences.

### **Themes for Mentors**

Table 3 illustrates the connections between the three themes that emerged from the qualitative data and displays the interview questions connected to those themes. The following represents the mentors responses categorized into the themes.

**Table 3***Themes Derived from Interview Questions for Mentors*

<b>Themes for Mentors</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Peer Mentorship Experience	Tell me about your experience as a peer mentor at this institution?
Impact of Peer Mentoring on Mentor	Describe how acting as a peer mentor to at-risk Black males affected your perceptions and experiences at this institution?
Personal Impact of Peer Mentoring	How did peer mentoring at-risk Black males affect you personally?

The mentors responded to three interview questions: 1. Tell me about your experience as a peer mentor at this institution? 2. Describe how acting as a peer mentor to at-risk Black males affected your perceptions and experiences at this institution? 3. How did peer mentoring at-risk Black males affect you personally? Three themes emerged from the mentors responses: Peer mentorship experience; Impact of peer mentoring on mentor; and Personal impact of peer mentoring. These three themes provide a framework for analyzing the data collected from the four participants who served as mentors in the study. The subsequent findings organize the participant responses into these thematic categories.

**Peer Mentorship Experience**

Mentor participants exhibited diverse responses, and all shared an appreciation for the peer mentoring experience. While acknowledging its challenges, they consistently highlighted the positive influence on both them and the students under their guidance. The mentors emphasized the significance of cultural understanding, establishing personal connections, and fostering trust within the mentor-mentee relationship.

Aaliyah shared positive sentiments stating, “I liked it for the most part.” However,

COVID-19 influenced her experience, and she expressed the “physical connection wasn't there” because of virtual mentoring sessions. Ultimately, she still expressed she was able to build a bond with some of her mentees. Stating “I felt like I was able to like help them, a lot of them ended up texting me after I graduated” and she expressed she continues to keep in contact with some of them through social media. Another mentor, Rudy, described his experience as a peer mentor from the perspective of an upperclassmen trying to help give his students a boost in navigating their experience.

Rudy shared his first impressions of his mentoring experience by stating:

We were told that some of these students need a little bit of boost in school and I didn't mind helping them, as a first-generation student, you don't understand or you don't have a lack, you lack skills in order to be a prospering student. Well, there's nothing wrong with that. It just means that they need a little bit to help. And that's what the peer mentor is about. Especially since it's one-on-one with the student and it's upper classmen like myself, we're able to help these students not make the same mistakes as I did. Because that's how I view it as, but more as though help them understand that it's okay to ask us for help.

Rudy recognized that the challenges faced by first-generation students did not mean they lacked the skills needed to succeed. However, he felt the experience taught him to share his experiences to help his mentees not make the same mistakes he made.

Additionally, Chris summed up his experience stating, “I feel like it's a great experience because I get to meet new people. Like from a black perspective.” Chris compared his mentoring experience to a movie he had previously seen called *Freedom writers* (2007), stating:

It was like a White teacher, she was trying to, like she was teaching a group of Black



students and it's kind of hard for them to open up and reach out to her. Because she didn't understand their language, the way they talk, their lifestyle. So, it's hard for them. It's like to accept her. Like, having my caseload, it's full of Black students. So, I feel like because we were able to understand each other, to be able to relate to each other. So that makes it way easier to like communicate, see how they're doing build that strong connection.

Chris's connection to his students was made easier because he knew how to communicate with his students because he could identify with their experience.

James shared how being a peer mentor was a challenging experience yet beneficial to help him build his knowledge base to help students. Furthermore, James shared his experience was challenging, yet rewarding.

My experience as a peer mentor at the institution, it has been challenging, but also has been really beneficial, because of the knowledge that you gain from it. And also the social aspect that you gain with every student I have realized that our students go through a lot things, in general, they are looking for those resources, which is, you know, some of the things that we kind of guide them through, in a way to kind of be successful here at the institution.

James continued, saying:

What I realize is that you can't help all the students, you know, you'll have some fails, and some, you know, some wins, so those are things that come with that experience, in a way for me, because I have helped students kind of get off academic probation, organize their schedules, you know, also kind of help them all, with you know personal problems, build that trusting relationship with them. But the main experience is that, yes, you lose and win some, but it's that trust and relationship that you go with the students, as a

mentee and mentor, and they'll still reach out even after, they get off their probation or after they already started declaring their majors. So, it's been a good experience so far.

He expressed how the experience allowed him to help students and build trusting relationships that ultimately helped students succeed.

### **Impact of Peer Mentoring on Mentor**

Mentors in the study conveyed various aspects of their experiences including recognizing the lack of institutional support for mentees at SIUC, the need to dispel stereotypes and acknowledge cultural differences, and find common ground in their experiences. Additionally, participants expressed mentoring motivated them to become more involved on campus. Overall, the responses underscored the significance of providing guidance, resources, and ongoing support for the mentees as a positive impact for the mentor.

Aaliyah reflected on her experience serving as a peer mentor and shared, “it really taught me how like little that SIU did to help them.” She continued stating:

I felt like for the most part, I had to be the one to like, guide him and instruct him on what's going on and like, how to do it. He would often tell me that his teachers weren't helping him enough, I feel like I gave him resources.

Aaliyah continued:

It kind of opened my eyes to just the overall institution, SIU as a whole. And it made me want to help them even more, even more than I could, even after I graduated, I gave them my contact information like hey, you know, we can still be in close contact even after graduation, just because I felt they didn't have the support system from like faculty that were in their classes at least. But I do think the exploratory program did help some of them and the peer mentoring they did benefit from it. And then for me, it just made me

want to help them more.

Aaliyah felt she had to take the initiative to guide her students because they would not get the same guidance elsewhere on campus.

Rudy characterized his mentor experience as impacting him in a positive way describing it as “really fun.” He described the impact of the experience stating:

A lot of it is just catching up. How are we doing? And as long as you can make that connection with the students see if they're able to continue going in with the motivational because they we both understand we're both students. I may falter at some point, they may falter. But we have this mutual understanding that, hey, we're doing our best, and we will help each other out. But so far, it's been such a great experience. And it's been wonderful helping these wonderful students.

He continued sharing his initial thoughts about working with Black men impacting him, stating:

And originally, I thought they would be more into sports and wanted to be more driven into that. But some of them, they are into the studies. And unfortunately, we have this stigma where Black males or Black excellence is not a thing. Those males aren't they're not at risk, but even just mentoring Black males. It made me realize that maybe they do need a little push like because it's my culture and their culture are way different, but we shared similarities because we're the oppressed ones.

Despite Rudy's initial assumptions about Black men being more sports oriented, he acknowledged their dedication to academics and the challenges associated with overcoming the stereotypes associated with Black males. Furthermore, this experience prompted him to realize the shared experiences with his mentees, which fostered a better understanding of his connection to his students.

Another participant, Chris, shared “actually, being a mentor made me want to get more involved on campus because I was meeting a group of new people.” He continued to describe how being a peer mentor impacted his experience, stating:

So, I meet with students, I want to say twice a week, once a week, I reach out to them. And I see how their classes is going. And if they need like, any help, resources, recommend resource like the writing center, seeing tutors, doing office hours. And then some students that won't really reach out so they've come to me and asked for help with questions such as, what should I do? Where should I go? So being able to be a resource for them is a good experience. That's how I basically see myself, as a resource.

Additionally, James described the impact of serving as a peer mentor, sharing:

I wouldn't say it has affected it, in a negative way, has affected it more in a positive way because the fact that I have met, like, even as a Hispanic male, we have a lot of similarities. You know, so that's one of the things that we share a lot with, black males. I treat them like, as they were still like my little brother and try to just understand them and kind of guide them in the best way possible.

James' experience positively impacted him, he emphasized discovering they shared many similarities led him to treat them like his little brothers.

### **Personal Impact of Peer Mentoring**

Participants who served as peer mentors offered a nuanced view of the personal impact of their mentoring experiences. Participants highlighted issues of race, institutional support, challenges faced by at-risk students, and the importance of personalized and supportive mentorship experiences as impacting their personal experiences.

Aaliyah shared how the experience impacted her: “It affected me personally, I think I

would say it was a learning curve.” Aaliyah continued to express how serving as a peer mentor made her reflect on her time as an undergraduate student, stating:

In my grad my undergrad program, it was mostly White. And even in like the faculty they were all White. It was just a handful of us in the CCJ program who were Black, I didn't really talk to them. So then actually talking to someone who is also the same color as me at this school gave me a different perspective on how other people view the school, they see how the teachers interact with them. How just like faculty in general, the lack of support that they had.

Aaliyah continued:

It really opened my eyes like I'm first-generation, but I had been here for four years already. So, I already knew how the ropes went. But seeing someone come in who's like actively struggling, definitely made me appreciate the knowledge that I was able to gather over the last four years more.

Aaliyah resumed:

It made me for the lack of a better word, it made me kind of side eye SIU. And because I've had experiences with teachers, where it was obvious that, color was the issue, like at hand between me and the faculty. And so, I already had that in the back of my mind, like meeting me, as I go around the campus. And so, then when I got to the mentees, and I realized that, hey, they're also still having this problem with faculty not really being as responsive as they should be to them. And as approachable as I think that they could be to the students. It made me feel like to a certain degree, they were setting people up for failure. And I still felt that way. Even when they will express to me like, hey, yeah, I tried to email this person five or six times, and they're away at home, so they can't really come

in person. And just be like, “hey, I’m at your office, can you help me?” They’re emailing and asking for help constantly, and they’re not receiving that help. And that just really made me have a negative view on the university.

Aaliyah felt the lack of diversity and lack of support in her undergraduate program impacted her experience as a student. She felt having the experience of fellow students sharing similar encounters with a lack of support from faculty members contributed to her desire to help her students overcome these obstacles.

Rudy shared his initial thoughts about “at-risk” students stating:

So, when I hear at-risk, my mind unfortunately, already thinks students who been in fights, students who are on academic probation, students who are on the last leg to be in this institution. And originally, my perception was, if they’re constantly getting into these types of things are they really benefiting themselves. I’m not a person to like, let them go. Because they might be a lost cause, I would try my best in every possible way to help them. But ultimately, I could do so much to help them, I can’t really hold them by their hand all the time, it’s up to them. And my perception at first, though, that’s my perception.

Rudy continued:

I know different things happen at home. So, they might be different focus points. And they might be here because they’re forced to, or they just want a little pause and break or do you just want to have fun, which is fine. And as I realized I had one student; he would never come out. I would text him on a regular basis. But he would never want to be with me because he has classes, he had other things to do. But then I realized he, he kind of had the choice of making himself better, but he didn’t. And that kind of like I was trying to help him all the way like, let’s go to classes, how can we communicate with one

another? I feel like at-risk people are missing communication or just general communications to be one huge factor.

Rudy expressed during the interview that his initial perceptions of “at-risk” students were shaped by his educational journey in pursuit of a social work degree, which influenced his personal outlook and initial beliefs. He stated:

I grew up in Chicago, Southside. I understand how much resources they try to help us out, especially for minorities. So, the reason why I think of at-risk, is because I am a social work major and at-risk to me means people who are constantly in violent behavior, people who need to be constantly checked around or checked in. It's just the way I been taught, especially in the foster care system. But at-risk, it's up to me to also change the perspective, because at-risk could also be a person who's really trying, but they just need a little bit more support, but they can't get the support.

He continued:

So, I had one Black male mentee. And it broke my heart when he kind of just fell off the face because we were in summer program together, and he was doing so good. And they just fell off. And to me, it makes me really disappointed. Because we try, I tried everything that I could to come help them. But now, unfortunately, they're going to view him as just another number like he's our little percentages that dropout. And as a minority who also has that constant pressure of predominantly White people, or especially for PWI's, to like, the minority give it like a semester or two until they drop out. And I hate being reflected off those numbers, we're more than just a number, we need more help. And when in order to say more help, it's more like, a lot of these students need motivation. They don't understand that. Even self-motivation could help you. And they're

away from home.

Rudy continued to describe how growing up in Chicago personally impacted his personal experiences while serving as a peer mentor to Black men, stating:

I would say another thing for me is in Chicago, we are segregated. So, we do our clicks like Latinos, but Latinos, black people with black people, and Asian Americans with Asian Americans. So, it, it was very beneficial for me to understand their style, their standards and prospective. Because then I could work with them. And see, so honestly, having Black male students is beneficial to my competence, competency, and others as well.

He continued sharing:

Personally, at first. Where I would grow up was so segregated but in the classroom, a lot of the students would be I hate saying this but they will not care for school. They would just cause a ruckus they'll be a class clown. And that made me realize, unfortunately that maybe there are certain people who really just want to go to school. And I don't want to say like maybe black people don't want school, I mean like those are the people who just goof off in school and one of those and I was more like dominant on going to school. So, I never saw that side of black people going to school. But going to here I saw how many black students are on the road are striving. For example, BAC, USG, this year was full of Black students and full of leaders. And I applaud them because they do a lot of hard work. And that's wonderful, unfortunate part that we and all Latinos and Black students face, we had to be in higher positions in order for higher ups that are controlled by White people, for them to even acknowledge.

Rudy expressed initial stereotypes associated with "at-risk" students, associating them with



academic struggles, potential violent behavior, and being on the verge of leaving the institution. Despite these preconceptions, he emphasized a commitment to helping students, recognizing the importance of understanding their individual skills, backgrounds, and challenges. He acknowledged the personal impact of external factors, such as combating stereotypes and emphasized how working toward combating those stereotypes personally impacted him personally while serving as a mentor to at risk Black men.

Chris stated the mentor experience personally impacted him by stating:

It actually made me want to help them more, because they're all really smart. But it's just, they needed someone to push them and believe in them. Because that's all some needs. It's like that push that drive. Because some of them lack that effort and that motivation.

Chris also added:

When I was younger, I didn't have anyone to push me. And I believe that, like, if you put your mind to it, you can do it. I was kind of like, on my own, I had to want it for myself. But in their case, it's like, everybody needs that at least that one person in their corner to root for them.

Chris expressed the experience impacted and fueled his desire to help students even more than he initially thought it would. He highlighted having someone believe in him and push him toward success was pivotal to his own success and he felt that he was able to provide that to his students.

Another mentor in the study, James, expressed the experience affected him personally by stating:

It has affected me personally, because of the fact that I figured that every student situation is different. So, although one student might require a little bit more time than another student. So, for example, I'll have a student that reaches out, you know, and will

be in communication a lot, and it's much easier to work with that student, then a student that's kind of closed in, you know, has really crazy trust issues and doesn't want to reach out for help. It's more challenging in a way because you have to kind of get in there and, emphasize on other things like, Okay, we're here for you, you know, it's a constant thing until they actually decide to open up, you have to build that trust in a way.

James continued:

So you have to really have to be in an have an open mind to be able to kind of read, you know, the student, especially individuals that come from a really, you know, crazy background, I wouldn't say crazy, but more difficult background of what they experience back at home and in their communities. Personally, I understood it because of the fact that as a Hispanic male that comes from a strict household. You also have Black males that come from a strict household, you know, that everything that they do, or you know, this and that, like kind of gets used against them and stuff like that. So, in a way, I kind of understood them.

He continued to express that it was pivotal to connect with students on a personal level, stating:

The way that I did it was, I opened up to them and give them my life examples. And, by giving them those life examples, you know that, like, okay, so he's trusting me, you know, with examples about his life, so maybe I should open up just a little bit. And so you kind of got to get them, you know, to open up bit by bit, because of the fact that they're in different situations. So, I try to put it in those, you know, real life examples of where I'm coming from, you know, what similarity do I have with them, and kind of build that trust relationship in a way. And then they'll end up opening up bit by bit.

He also expressed he personalized his mentoring experience to help build a better connection to

students, stating:

For me, I like that support system, my like, my family. So, my parents let's say, because of the fact that they were always just working, so I'm the oldest in the family. So I was always on my own, I was always trying to figure out things on my own, you know, a lot of these Black students, you know, they come in, and they're also first-generation, or the oldest in their family, and by the way, also COVID didn't help. So, they come in as, you know, that perspective of, like oh, I can't do this, I don't think this is for me, maybe I should just you know, drop out and go back home. So, in a way I try to bring in those experiences as well, of how I was the oldest in the family, I am first-gen, I have similar backgrounds as them.

James emphasized providing students with encouragement and resilience in overcoming personal obstacles and sharing his own experiences with his mentees impacted his personal experience serving as a mentor.

Subsequently, the participants in this study described various experiences that affected their self-efficacy as well as their understandings of college life and how to navigate their new environment during their first year. Additionally, they communicated that their experience with their mentor or acting as a mentor influenced their motivation, perceptions, and general sense of belonging as students.

### **Bandura's Self-efficacy Framework**

The framework guiding this study revolves around Bandura's (1977) notion of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy entails an individual's belief in their ability to execute the necessary actions for accomplishing specific performance outcomes, reflecting confidence in influencing events and maintaining control over their environment (Bandura, 1977). As theorized by

Bandura (1977), an individual's self-efficacy can play a pivotal role in shaping motivation, overall well-being, and personal accomplishments. Furthermore, Bandura (1977) identified four primary sources influencing an individual's self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. The following section outlines each participant's experiences of their peer mentoring experience as it relates to Bandura's self-efficacy framework.

### **Mastery Experiences**

Several of the participants in the study expressed answers to the interview questions that displayed self-efficacy mastery experiences. Participants Aaliyah, Kevin, Rudy, Jermaine, Chris, Tim, and James all conveyed varying responses related to their experience -- the following is a brief synopsis of their responses. Aaliyah primarily highlighted the experience in providing help to others, particularly when mentees displayed gratitude and satisfaction from their experience to her even after graduation. She reflected on her own growth, recognizing the value of her knowledge and how significant it was in helping her mentees, especially those who faced challenges in their first year and the challenges faced by her students who were first-generation students.

Kevin expressed how the experience changed his life as a person coming from Chicago and a hostile environment and attributed the pivotal role that his mentor played in influencing his positive trajectory. He also expressed he felt everyone looked at him differently in a positive light and he felt like he thrived in the new environment with guidance from his mentor. Rudy communicated how he benefited from the experience, and how it changed his perspective about Black men. He emphasized it challenged his preconceived typecasts particularly as a person coming from highly segregated Chicago. After the experience, he recognized the benefits of

understanding diverse perspectives and he felt like the experience enhanced his ability to work effectively with individuals from different backgrounds. Jermaine expressed how the mentoring experience helped him set and achieve his goals and attributed the experience in influencing him returning to school. He shared that without the support of his peer mentor he believed he might not have been as successful or motivated to continue. He attributed the connection to his mentor with helping him to create goals and push him to persevere through adversity.

Chris conveyed he felt he was able to build meaningful connections with the students in his caseload because they were all Black men and able to relate to each other. He mentioned how being a mentor motivated him to become more involved on campus and encouraged him to expand his social connections. Tim suggested the peer mentoring experience had a positive impact on his time management skills and overall transition to college life. He attributed the presence of a mentor in contributing to his academic success in passing a challenging course. He also expressed that without his mentors help he might not have continued his education after his first year. James revealed the challenges he experienced as a peer mentor benefited him in acquiring knowledge to help him in the future. He emphasized building a lasting connection with the mentees helped him overcome challenges and in turn made the experience positive and valuable for him as a mentor.

### **Vicarious Experience**

Eleven of the participants in the study communicated responses to the interview questions that exhibited self-efficacy vicarious experience characteristics. The following is a summary of their responses. Kevin expressed he considered his mentor to be a “big brother” to him. He conveyed that they developed a bond working together and described his mentor as someone he could rely on in all aspects of his life. He explained his mentor provided him with motivation and

support to pursue his academic journey as a student who originally did not want to come to college. Rudy articulated he had a new commitment to helping students given his experience as a peer mentor. He emphasized the one-on-one interactions were a key component for him in understanding his peers and enhancing his positive experience.

Byron emphasized the importance of seeing someone who looked like him with a similar background as providing a sense of reassurance and support in his first-year experience. He highlighted his mentors' consistent presence around campus as particularly impactful in motivating him to stay on top of his academic responsibilities. He also shared that he felt his mentoring experience added a component of personal accountability to produce positive responses about his academic progress to his mentor. Jason reflected on his first-year experience, attributing much of his success to the peer mentoring program. He described his mentor as a guide that introduced him to campus resources. He said his mentor played a pivotal role in helping him communicate with his professors and helped him get acclimated to life on campus. Overall, he indicated the experience had a comprehensive impact on his personal life as well as his academic journey.

Jermaine stated the experience provided a valuable support system offering him someone to talk to, set goals and help guide him in his first year. He also described having a peer mentor share a similar background made it easier for him to communicate with one another. He also said his mentor influenced his academic success by "broadening my horizon" and recommending them to various resources on campus. Additionally, he expressed how his mentor played a crucial role in motivating him to achieve his goals and persist through adversity. Chris also emphasized having the support system of a peer mentor provided a sense of connection and motivation for him. He explained having someone reach out to him and check on him made him

feel involved and heard given the disconnect with his parents not understanding his college experience. He conveyed how his mentor organizing study sessions played a pivotal role in keeping him on track academically. He mentioned how lacking guidance when he was younger gave him a better appreciation of the experience of having someone root for his success in college. In turn, he expressed, as a mentor, he felt like a resource to his students.

Tim shared that his mentor played a role in enhancing his time management skills in completing his work on time. Additionally, he felt the experience gave him a sense of community in helping him stay focused in setting his priorities in the proper order. He also expressed his mentor played a pivotal role in his social integration to campus by introducing him to new people and making new friends. James stressed building trust with his mentees helped him understand his students better through shared life experiences. He expressed finding common ground with his Black male students gradually helped him realize they share common challenges and reinforced his idea he could encourage them to overcome and persist in their academic journey.

Stephen claimed having a mentor available for support helped especially through challenging times. He expressed, initially, he had difficulty in adapting to his peer mentor but shared that consistent communication with his mentor helped him gain a better understanding of the nuances of being a student. He shared the “one-on-one environment did benefit me because that helped me understand a little bit more. Not necessarily on how I needed to be as a student, but how I needed to adapt as a person to then be a student.” Desmon described the importance of having a supportive network in helping him stay focused. He shared his mentors firsthand experience with college stimulated confidence in their guidance and contributed to his focus and success in his first year. Overall, he expressed having a mentor who understood his situation and

had achieved success helped add valuable motivation for his first-year experience. Daniel also shared how having a mentor with similar experiences and who looked like them positively influenced their perceptions. He highlighted how the mentor served as a reliable source of support and a person who helped direct him to comfortable social spaces. He also likened the experience to a “big brother” experience that provided guidance in his first year particularly as a first-generation student. He expressed how having parents who did not have a college experience impacted his journey and helped him easily relate socially to his mentor.

### **Verbal Persuasion**

Eight of the participants in the study communicated responses to the interview questions that demonstrated self-efficacy traits of verbal persuasion. The following is a summary of their responses. Aaliyah conveyed that her mentees congratulated her on the job she did and expressed that the verbal acknowledgement “made me want to help them even more.” Kevin stated his communications with his mentor gave him motivation to continue his academic journey. Stating his mentor was “somebody who believed in me down here” and “I could trust him.” He also conveyed, “I thank my mentor for that because he always checks up on me no matter what time.” Byron emphasized how his mentor fostered and inspired him by setting high expectations for him and influenced him to meet those expectations and provide positive feedback when asked. He also stated that being able to easily communicate and relate with his mentor provided a supportive environment for him in his first year. Jermaine expressed his peer mentor played a crucial role in setting goals and encouraging persistence through challenges and he highlighted the positive reception he received from being a first-generation college student.

Chris referenced how he had limited conversations with his parents about school experiences and highlighted the importance of his mentor in providing motivation and



encouragement to get involved on campus. Tim claimed he struggled in a course and his mentor stepped in to help him and pushed him to stay on track. He shared, “it certainly helped me stay here, right, because I know for a fact that if my mentor didn't do what she did, I would not have passed.” James expressed he had experiences as a mentor where he observed students overcome challenges and given the relationship he built with them, they still reached out to him even after they moved off academic probation. He said the experience was rewarding. Daniel described having a mentor with previous experiences played a role in his success in navigating challenges. He shared having constant reminders from his mentor about staying organized impacted his experience. He also highlighted having someone to talk to helped him, stating that “It's no one else I can really talk to like about certain things. So, I can talk to him, and he'll get it.” This strong communitive connection between Daniel and his mentor contributed to positive self-efficacy outcomes because it enabled Daniel to share his experience and thoughts while his mentor provided encouragement and consistent communication.

### **Physiological States**

Eleven of the twelve participants conveyed responses during the interviews that showed self-efficacy traits related to physiological states in their mentoring experiences. The subsequent synopsis captures the essence of their responses. Aaliyah said the experience was a personal learning curve for her. She conveyed talking to other students from her same racial background provided a different perspective on how others perceived the institution and made her feel different about her role as a mentor. Kevin communicated gratitude that his mentor impacted his life by supporting him in overcoming personal loss and transforming his outlook given his chaotic home environment, by his mentor believing in him and serving as a “big brother” during his first year. Rudy expressed working with Black men affected him emotionally by stating, “it

broke my heart” and shared that his personal outlook on his experiences made him want to help students not become “just another number” or statistic contributing to negative perceptions.

Byron expressed positive emotions associated with having a mentor who was approachable and emphasized the development of having lifelong friendships from the experience. He stated:

I don't know how to explain it, but it felt good like it was just a good feeling, cause as soon as I seen who my mentor and started to talk, like okay I can do this, I can actually talk to him.

Jason articulated during his first year he struggled with depression which led to him avoid classes and he attributed the difficulties with his home life and his family not understanding his experience. Jermaine stated he felt like his voice was not being heard and it affected him emotionally in his first-year experience.

Chris expressed how, at first, he thought attending a PWI intimidated him: “I was kind of scared to attend” and having a mentor provided a sense of belonging as he shared it was his mentor who “made me feel comfortable and welcome” which changed his perspective. Tim also expressed he was initially apprehensive and had some anxiety about coming to a PWI. Stephen communicated he did not know what to expect and he had some unease about his experiences and was hesitant to be vulnerable with his mentor concerning his mental and emotional health. Desmon also expressed sentiments of anxiety and apprehension about asking others for help. Daniel additionally expressed initial feelings of doubt about fitting in at a PWI as well.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Participant GPAs in the study were tracked by the SSI program. The following table outlines a statistical description of the participants GPAs while serving as a peer mentor to at-

risk Black men as well as the Black men GPAs while in the SSI program during their first year. The semester GPAs of the participants throughout several semesters are summarized in this table and it shows their academic progress over time. The Fall 2020, Spring 2021, Fall 2021, Spring 2022, Fall 2021, and Spring 2023 semester GPAs of the participants are listed. The "Current Status" column indicates if a participant is an inactive student, has graduated, or is continuing their education at the institution. The bottom of the table provides an overview of the average GPAs for each semester for all participants.

**Table 4***Participant GPA's*

	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2021	Spring 2023	Current Status
Aaliyah	3.60	4.0					Graduated
Jason			2.60	1.86			Continuing
Jermaine			3.27	2.87			Continuing
Chris			3.11	2.78			Continuing
Tim					3.02	2.67	Continuing
James		4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	Graduated
Stephen					2.50	1.50	Continuing
Desmon			2.71	2.31			Continuing
Daniel			3.58	3.00			Continuing
Kevin					2.17	1.22	Inactive Student
Rudy					3.44	4.00	Continuing
Byron					2.91	1.25	Continuing
Average	3.60	4.0	3.21	2.80	3.01	2.44	

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the findings of the study. To ensure participant ambiguity, the research employed structured interviews that I transcribed and processed for analysis. The study used Saldaña's (2009) coding methods and NVivo software to group the responses into themes according to Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy conceptual framework and I used three themes to examine the mentees' viewpoints: Perceptions and experiences of first-year students; Effects of peer mentoring on mentees; and Effects of peer mentoring on success or failure in first-year students. Additionally, the four participants who acted as peer mentors provided insights into the mentors' perspective. These inquiries probed their experiences as mentors in general, and the impact of mentoring at-risk Black men. Three main themes emerged from the analysis: Peer mentorship experience; Impact of peer mentoring on mentor; and Personal impact of peer

mentoring. To conclude, descriptive statistics were provided of the participants of the study to provide additional perspective to the findings. The findings conclude both mentees and mentors experienced positive and negative aspects of their peer mentoring experience. Overwhelmingly the mentees expressed positive experiences and the mentors expressed positive outcomes in the experience affecting their experience while serving as mentors. Furthermore, participants expressed having someone check-in on them and motivate them impacted their success in their first year and made them feel more connected and increased their desire to continue their college journey. In addition, some participants conveyed some frustration about the lack of support they felt as well as an unease with their environment and their sense of belonging when they first arrived at campus. The following chapter summarizes the findings of the study as well as offers recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I begin with providing a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of the findings. Additionally, I present implications and recommendations and conclude with suggestions for further research.

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the peer mentoring experience of first year at-risk Black men and the effect of peer mentoring on mentors and mentees at a rural PWI. The study sought to address the problem of Black men not graduating at the same rate as their peers. The data from this study corroborated findings from Brooks et al., (2013) and Stoller (2021) finding that peer mentoring increased student involvement, facilitated social integration, provided support, and role modeling for students who participate in Black male initiative retention programs including peer mentoring programs. The research confirmed the conclusions drawn by Ottley and Ellis (2019) and Simmons and Smith (2020), emphasizing the significance of students experiencing a sense of belonging on campus and having a supportive individual who encourages and motivates them to excel academically. This study sought to address the problem through examining the experiences of at-risk Black male students at a rural PWI and students who served as their mentors in their first year at the institution. The data affirmed the findings from Peck (2011) and Kiyama and Luca (2014) which found that peer mentors experienced personal growth and developed an increased sense of appreciation for diversity and a stronger connection with their students by serving as a leader. Rudy explicitly

conveyed that he experienced a transformation in how he initially thought about at-risk Black males given his experience serving as a mentor to his students. James noted that he identified various commonalities with his mentees from a diversity standpoint, which significantly influenced his sense of appreciation derived from his experience serving as a peer mentor.

In this study, I asked the mentees to describe their perceptions and experiences in their first year at the institution and how peer mentoring impacted their experience. I asked how peer mentoring affected their success or failure in their first year of college. Additionally, I specifically asked the mentors in the study about their experience serving as a peer mentor at the institution and how particularly serving Black men affected their perceptions and experiences at the institution and how it affected them personally. From this inquiry, three themes emerged from the mentees and mentors. For the mentees the themes that emerged were: First-year perceptions and experiences; Impact of peer mentoring on mentee; impact of peer mentoring on first-year success or failure.

### **First-Year Perceptions and Experiences**

Participants had diverse first-year experiences. Kevin described his experiences and the lessons he learned during his summer experience. Learning from his mentor how to focus on his academic pursuits and learning independence being away from home the first time in his life helped him immensely. Byron highlighted he formed a lifelong friendship with his mentor. Jason credited his mentor with guiding him and providing crucial information in his first year. As a first-generation student, Jermaine struggled with adapting to college life and being away from home. Chris initially had reservations about his experience, but he credited his mentor with making him feel welcome at the institution. Tim described his mother had reservations about the institution sight unseen; however, when he arrived, he found a diverse community of people

when he moved in. Stephen acknowledged he initially did not have any preconceived notions about school but did say there was an adjustment he had to make to the environment which he was not accustomed to, and it required him to change his mindset. Desmon emphasized the support of his mentor facilitated an easy transition in his first year. While Daniel initially was apprehensive about his experience at first due to his background, he discovered a welcoming environment that challenged his preconceptions about socializing with different racial groups. Overall, participants acknowledged diverse influences on their first-year perceptions and experiences.

### **Impact of Peer Mentoring on Mentee**

Several participants had positive views on the impact of peer mentoring in their first year. Many shared experiences about their mentor encouraging them, being relatable, and supporting them socially by helping them integrate into college life. Some of the participants emphasized the importance of having shared experiences with their mentor and others valued that the relationship connected them with valuable resources. Kevin expressed that his mentor had a significant positive impact on him, sharing that he considers his mentor as a big brother. Byron also shared positive sentiments, emphasizing how his mentor eased his initial concerns by fostering a sense of belonging and connecting through shared experiences. Jason had reservations at first but found the experience to be valuable because his mentor helped him find people who he connected with that understood his background. Jermaine credited his peer mentor with helping him set goals and providing guidance through challenges. Chris, Tim, and Desmon highlighted their mentors' role in motivating them through time management struggles and helping them stay connected with campus. Daniel also expressed his mentor positively influenced his experience because they understood his experiences as a first-generation student.



However, Stephen expressed indifference with his experience, asserting that he found it challenging to be emotionally vulnerable with his mentor. Overall, the participants conveyed a positive impact of peer mentoring on their first-year experience.

### **Impact of Peer Mentoring on First-Year Success or Failure**

Most participants found peer mentoring to be beneficial to their first-year success. They credited their peer mentor with providing guidance, support, and motivation. However, one participant was uncertain about the impact of mentoring on his success but acknowledged a sense of relief of having someone there to support him through his first year. Kevin, Byron, Jason, Jermaine, Chris, Tim, Stephen, Desmon, and Daniel all shared positive mentoring experiences that impacted their success in their first year. Their accounts offered instances of their mentor playing a crucial role in offering guidance, support, and motivation in their first-year experiences. Kevin described his mentor as a big brother figure in his life providing support to help him stay on track in balancing his social and academic responsibilities, as well as crediting his mentor with fostering a new perspective on his life. Byron highlighted the impact of his mentor on his work ethic which impacted his utilization of campus resources, which led to academic success. Jason expressed how his mentor impacted his ability to navigate challenges in his first year including academic and mental challenges. He credited his mentor with impacting his ability to effectively communicate with his instructors which impacted his first-year success.

Jermaine credited his mentor with helping him set goals and providing support and encouragement as a first-generation student -- which played a vital role in his first-year success. Chris highlighted his mentors' consistent check-ins, study sessions, and motivational messages as positively impacting his first-year success. Tim shared how the guidance and support he received from his mentor helped him avoid potential failure in a class. Alternatively, Stephen

expressed mixed feelings about a direct impact of peer mentoring on his success. Desmon shared his mentor impacted his priorities as a student, providing him with focus which ultimately led to his overall success in his first year. Additionally, Daniel also shared his mentor served as a big brother relationship which positively guided him through the challenges as a first-generation college student and impacted his first-year success. Peer mentoring constantly emerged as a positive influence in the participant responses. Concurrently, the study also sought to further understand the effect of the peer mentoring experience on the mentors. For the mentors, the themes that emerged included: Peer mentorship experience; Impact of peer mentoring on mentor; and Personal impact of peer mentoring. The following summarizes the three themes that emerged.

### **Peer Mentorship Experience**

Participants who served as mentors provided varied responses. They all expressed gratitude for the peer mentoring experience, while recognizing its challenges. They consistently emphasized the positive impact on themselves and the students they mentored. Aaliyah had a positive experience with mentoring though she served as mentor during the COVID-19 pandemic. She felt she built lasting bonds with her mentees. Rudy saw the mentoring experience as an opportunity to provide a boost to fellow students. Chris valued the experience and highlighted the importance of being able to communicate with his students and build a connection with them. James found the experience to be challenging but rewarding, emphasizing the knowledge he gained in how to build relationships and trust with his students as a positive experience.

### **Impact of Peer Mentoring on Mentor**

The mentor participants in the study revealed a diverse set of experiences while serving

as a mentor. They highlighted challenges such as a lack of institutional support for mentees. They also emphasized the importance of dispelling stereotypes and recognizing cultural differences as impacting their experience. Additionally, they noted mentoring motivated them to increase their campus involvement. Overall, their responses emphasized the importance of offering guidance, resources, and continuous support for their mentees as impacting their experience while serving as a mentor. Aaliyah reflected her role as a peer mentor impacted her in recognizing the minimal support provided by the institution for her mentees. She expressed that she felt the need to guide her mentees and offer ongoing support even after she graduated. Rudy defined his experience as “really fun” and emphasized the impact of having a mutual understanding with his students as impacting his experience. Chris said his experience impacted and motivated him to be more involved on campus to be a valuable resource for his mentees. James stressed the experience positively impacted him because he discovered he shared a variety of similarities with his mentees which led him to treat his mentees like his little brother. Generally, the mentors recognized the challenges they faced; however, they felt empowered to make a positive difference in their mentees’ lives which impacted their experience serving as a mentor.

### **Personal Impact of Peer Mentoring**

Peer mentors shared mixed perspectives about the personal impact of their experience serving as a peer mentor. Their reflections indicated an intricate understanding of the dynamic involved in their roles, as serving as mentors to this population of students. Aaliyah expressed how her experience impacted her in gaining a better awareness to the lack of support for students of color at the institution. This realization prompted her to be proactive in guiding her students. Rudy acknowledged initially he had a stereotypical perception of at-risk Black men students

given his educational training as a student and upbringing in Chicago. However, after his experience serving as a peer mentor, he acknowledged the personal impact of the experience in helping him with combating those stereotypes often shared about Latinos and Black male students. Chris found his experience fueled his desire to help students and made him reflect on his own educational journey which motivated him to be a source of encouragement for his mentees. James shared serving as a mentor impacted him personally in a positive way. Emphasizing the importance of the importance of building a connection and trust with his students as personally impacting his experience. Overall, the mentors acknowledged the experience personally impacted them. Institutional barriers and stereotypes associated with their mentees impacted their experience however, they conveyed that the experiences impacted them positively by nurturing a commitment to providing support, guidance, and encouragement to help students overcome those obstacles.

### **Bandura's Self-efficacy Framework**

Moreover, the experiences of both mentees and mentors were examined through the theoretical lens of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy model. Bandura (1977) outlined four key sources that shape an individual's self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Participants in the study shared their experiences as mentees and mentors, highlighting positive impacts on their self-efficacy. Participants expressed the fulfillment they found in assisting mentees, challenging preconceived notions, building meaningful connections, and transforming lives. Mastery experiences contributed to participants personal growth, academic success, and emotional well-being. Also, participants discussed vicarious experiences stressing the importance of mentors as big brothers, motivators, and sources of support. Additionally, verbal persuasion played a key role in the experience as

mentees expressed the impact of mentors providing motivation and encouragement and fostering a sense of belonging. In addition, various instances of an impact on physiological states were expressed by participants in navigating emotional challenges, with an emphasis on mentors and mentees relying on shared experiences to overcome anxiety and doubt, with mentors serving as a source of support in navigating those challenges. The data revealed a pronounced impact of peer mentoring on the mentees self-efficacy in terms of academic success, assisting in fostering emotional and meaningful connections, creating a supportive environment, and positively influencing their perceptions and experiences in their first year.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to address the problem of Black men not being retained at the same level of their peers. Additionally, this study sought to add to the research foundation provided by (Brooms, 2018; Harper, 2016; Ottley, 2018; Ottley & Ellis, 2014). This study focused on three areas, at-risk Black men retention, peer mentoring at rural PWI's, and the experiences of the peer mentors serving this population. As Ottley (2018) indicated "rarely have studies explored the perceptions of retention programs through the lenses of its participants" (p. 11). Overall, the 12 research participants expressed a wide variety of representations of their perceptions and experiences. Some participants mentioned their initial perceptions of the institution were uninformed and led them to stereotype the institution negatively. However, several participants in the study found after arriving to campus and being linked with their mentor helped alleviate their initial concerns about being able to fit into their new environment.

Numerous participants mentioned the mentoring experience positively. They stressed the experience provided enduring friendships and helped them navigate a new environment by connecting them with resources on campus. Several participants emphasized the importance of

having a mentor who had similar experiences and came from similar cultural and racial backgrounds. Many of the mentees expressed the importance of their mentor looking like them, as well as coming from similar life experiences as positively impacting their ability to relate to their mentor. Numerous participants highlighted the experience impacted their success in their first year by changing their mentality and motivating them to get out of their comfort zone. Although not all mentees expressed the mentoring experience impacted their first-year success, all the mentees did share their gratitude of having someone there for them and available to call on if they needed it in their first year.

The struggles Black men face in higher education institutions as outlined in Chapter II provide a relentless pattern of Black students facing similar institutional barriers to success. Some participants in the study acknowledged and confirmed the struggles Black men have been facing for ages. Participants emphasized their experience with not being well-versed in communicating with their professors and being unfamiliar with communicating in their new environment. Participants also stressed they were reluctant to ask for help. They also stressed having their mentor help them navigate through their environment eased their transition into college life. Mentors and mentees both compared their mentor experience to a big brother experience. Moreover, one of the participants, Kevin, shared that the experience changed his life and provided him a new outlook on life. One of the mentors, Aaliyah, said that the experience made her realize how much her experience as an undergraduate student mirrored her mentees experiences in being underrepresented and underserved, subsequently, the experience gave her a greater sense of obligation to help Black men overcome the lack of institutional support. Initially, one mentor admitted to holding stereotypical views of at-risk Black male students, shaped by his educational background and upbringing in Chicago. However, serving as a peer mentor

prompted a personal transformation, allowing him to confront and challenge the stereotypes commonly associated with Black men students. Largely, peer mentoring had a positive impact on both mentors and mentees. Their reported experiences ultimately indicated they experienced positive self-efficacy outcomes which led to them growing positively on a multitude of levels including academically and personally.

### **Implications**

Throughout the study, many of the challenges experienced by at-risk Black men became recognizable and commonalities emerged as contributing toward their mentoring experience in their first year. The findings suggest four areas of importance among mentees: adapting and communicating in a new environment; someone who looks like me; building a relationship and trust; and finding an example in their new environment to emulate. All the aforementioned factors were collectively acknowledged as shared experiences among many mentees. Many of them struggled with adapting to their new PWI environments socially, as it did not operate in the same manner as the setting with which they were familiar. Additionally, the Black male participants initially expressed apprehension with opening and engaging in their new environment without prompts from a person who they identified with in their mentor. Many of the participants expressed the importance of having someone who looked like them as contributing toward their ability to being open to communicating. Moreover, several of the mentees emphasized the importance of having someone to emulate who had shared experiences as contributing to their positive peer mentoring experience and success in their first year at a rural PWI.

The findings suggest four areas of importance among mentors including building trust, motivation, overcoming stereotypes, and institutional barriers as areas many of the mentor

participants stressed as impacting their experience as a mentor. They conveyed it was vital to build trust within the mentoring relationship. The trust was built by mentors connecting mentees with valuable resources on campus and connecting them with socially in their new environment. Also, mentors indicated motivating their mentees impacted their experience serving as a mentor and made them more invested in the relationship likening the experience to treating their mentee like a younger sibling. Three out of four mentors acknowledged the impact of stereotypes and institutional barriers on their experiences in mentoring at-risk Black men.

### **Urban Mentees' Transition to Rural PWI**

All the participants in the study come from metropolitan areas. The rural nature of the institution impacted some of the mentee's initial perceptions. Several mentioned that they experienced anxiety about not being able to find people they could relate to. All the mentees came from large urban environments, and this played a role in their experiences in the rural PWI environment. The Black men in this study expressed they had to learn a new way of communicating in their new environment. Upon arrival to campus, they recognized the necessity to adjust their behavior to suit the new environment, which differed significantly from their home environment. Stephen articulated this adaptation succinctly, noting how his peer mentor showed him "how I need to operate and what I need to think like" during his first year. This underscores the crucial difference between their home settings and the campus atmosphere, which underscores the vital need to pair these students with peer mentors who share similar backgrounds that have already successfully navigated this transition themselves.

### **Intentionality and Familiarity**

In this study, mentees found significant benefits in being matched with mentors who shared similar demographic, first-generation, and racial backgrounds. Many expressed feeling



more comfortable discussing their concerns with their mentors rather than their parents, given the mentors' understanding of their challenges in the new environment. This familiarity helped alleviate stress and anxiety. The data underscores the importance of intentionally pairing mentors with mentees from comparable backgrounds, as emphasized by Jermaine, who attributed this dynamic to his decision to continue in college. It's crucial for institutions aiming to improve retention among this population to prioritize such intentional pairing.

### **Recommendations**

Given the implications of the data, I have constructed specific recommendations for higher education administrators that are crucial for enhancing retention rates among at-risk Black male students, including:

1. **Provide intentional social support:** Institutions must introduce at-risk Black men to their new environments as soon as possible. Institutions must be intentional in pairing at-risk Black students with individuals who have already navigated the adjustment barriers in the environment. Jermaine stated “If I didn’t have nobody there helping me create goals and create things that they know that somebody will need to be successful as a first-year student. I don't think I would have been successful as I am.” He also added that that he would not have come back to the institution without the intentional support from his mentor. At-risk Black men who come from large urban environments must be paired with mentors who have already assimilated and adapted to the rural PWI environment.
2. **Deliberate pairing:** Be intentional in pairing at-risk Black men with people who look like them. Black men in the study stressed the importance of their mentor looking like them. Byron expressed the advantages he gained from being intentionally matched

- with a mentor who shared his racial background, stating, “the conversation felt like I already knew them or, you know, they were easy to relate, they knew what I was talking about.” Several mentees explicitly expressed that they found it essential to have someone they could relate to who had already experienced their current circumstances.
3. Cultivate a culture of equitable engagement: Institutions must begin by understanding Black male students' starting points and guide and empower them to reach the established standards. It is important to meet these students where they are initially and teach and develop them to meet the standard. Institutions must create campus atmospheres that support the growth of students who are less acquainted. Faculty and staff throughout the campus must aim to assist students impartially, mirroring the approach taken by mentors guiding new faculty members in adapting to their roles.
  4. Establish Black male retention initiatives: It is essential that retention initiatives for at-risk Black students clearly focus on building trusting relationships and community with other Black students. It is essential to their integration and to them feeling comfortable in participating in their new environment. Several of the mentees said that they felt like their voices were not being heard. Additionally, all the mentors stated that they experienced positive self-efficacy outcomes because of their experience serving this population.
  5. Create a system for ongoing support: Institutions must adopt a holistic approach to assess Black men success beyond and in addition to academic achievement. Recognize that support must extend beyond their first-year experience. Several of the

mentees expressed that they would not have returned to the institution if not for their strong relationship they built with their mentor.

I believe that Black male students would benefit from continued support beyond simply being retained in their first year. Ultimately, the objective for an institution must be the graduation of all admitted students. Institutions should strive to create an atmosphere of continuous improvement across all student groups and not be content with the status quo.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Further research is needed to understand at-risk Black men student experiences beyond their first year. Further research should examine this population throughout their college experience. Moreover, additional research should investigate the intersectionality of peer mentoring experiences among Black men students adapting to rural PWI environments, particularly focusing on distinctions between individuals from urban and rural backgrounds. As well, one of the mentees in the study, Chris, took on the role of a mentor after completing his first year. Future research could delve into the distinct long-term implications for individuals who transition from mentees to mentors based on their initial mentee experiences. This information can contribute to the current knowledge base of higher education administrators to craft programing and best practice policies that will help reach and retain Black male students at PWIs. Also, two of the students who served as mentors to at-risk Black men identified as Latino. Subsequent research could examine the long-term impact of this experience on them, particularly in their progression as students at a rural PWI. Furthermore, additional research could explore the commonalities among at-risk Latino and Black men students at a rural PWI. Research that examines these commonalities could offer insights into best practices to help enhance the retention of both struggling populations.

## Conclusion

This study addressed the critical issue of retention among Black men in higher education, building upon existing literature and providing valuable insights into the experiences of both mentees and mentors. The study underscores the importance of providing deliberate social support, intentional pairing, equitable engagement, and establishing retention initiatives designed to address this specific population. Including the need to provide continuous support systems that enhance the academic success and retention rates of at-risk Black male students. By acknowledging the challenges faced by this demographic and implementing targeted programs, higher education administrators can create environments on their campus that foster inclusivity, belonging, and ultimately, graduation for Black male students. Institutions must prioritize this demographic and aim for equitable outcomes. Peer mentoring proved indispensable for the Black men in this study; they emphasized that without their peer mentor's support, they would not have completed their first year. Additionally, the students who served as peer mentors expressed the profound personal impact of the experience. It enabled them to confront personal stereotypes and feel empowered to bring about positive change in the lives of their mentees. Higher education administrators must pay attention to the firsthand accounts articulated by these students. The Black men in this study candidly articulated what they experienced and perceived in their first year. They sincerely shared how peer mentoring impacted their success in their first year. The question now is: will administrators listen to their voices?

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## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Email

Dear Participant,

My name is Kristopher Marshall. I am a doctoral student at Southern Illinois University Carbondale in the department of Educational Administration and Higher Education. I invite you to participate in a doctoral research study called PEER MENTORING EXPERIENCE OF FIRST YEAR AT-RISK BLACK MALES AND THE EFFECT OF PEER MENTORING ON MENTORS AND MENTEES AT A RURAL PWI. The purpose of this study is to understand how first-year at-risk Black males perceive their peer mentoring experience and its effects on their peer mentors at a rural PWI. Your responses will be used to improve the peer mentoring experience for students at Southern Illinois University.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. To participate in this study, you must be 18 years of age, served as a peer mentor to a black male student in the saluki success initiative program, or have been a black male student admitted and enrolled in the SSI program. Not participating or withdrawing will bear no penalty and have no effect on class standing, grades, services, or care provided by the university. The amount of time required for the interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes. There are no known risks related with this research and there are no financial benefits or personal benefits to participating in this research. Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected, and you will not be personally identifiable in the analysis of the information you provide. If you choose to participate in this study, please contact Kristopher Marshall at [sheed@siu.edu](mailto:sheed@siu.edu). You will be contacted by email about your potential participation in this study a maximum of three times, if you would like to opt out of receiving further communications please send an email to [sheed@siu.edu](mailto:sheed@siu.edu) stating your desire to be removed from further communications.

If you choose to participate in this study, please contact Kristopher Marshall at [sheed@siu.edu](mailto:sheed@siu.edu).

If you have any issues or concerns about this study, contact Kristopher Marshall at 618-203-4321 or [sheed@siu.edu](mailto:sheed@siu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Saran Donahoo at 618-453-6077 or [donahoo@siu.edu](mailto:donahoo@siu.edu).

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Institutional Review Board. Questions

concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Institutional

Review Board Chair, Office of Research Compliance, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale,

IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4534. E-mail [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu).

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Form

Thank you for willing to participate in this research study on the PEER MENTORING EXPERIENCE OF FIRST YEAR AT-RISK BLACK MALES AND THE EFFECT OF PEER MENTORING ON MENTORS AND MENTEES AT A RURAL PWI conducted by Kristopher Marshall. I am a doctoral student at Southern Illinois University Carbondale in the department of Educational Administration and Higher Education I am also an academic advisor for the saluki success initiative program in the office of exploratory student advisement. The purpose the research is to identify characteristics of at-risk Black male students perceived ability to succeed in academia given their experiences during their first year at a rural PWI with a peer mentor.

The amount of time required for the interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes, to participate in this study, you must be 18 years of age. The interview will be video/audiotaped and transcribed. The video/audio recordings will be stored securely and destroyed in three years in accordance with IRB standards. Participants in this study should refrain from using names of non-participants during the interview. Your privacy and confidentiality will always be protected, and your identity will not be revealed in the results of this study. Not participating or withdrawing from this study will have no effect on class standing, grades, services, or care provided by the university.

Participation in this interview is voluntary and you can choose to not participate or withdraw at any time. There are no known risks related with this research and there are no financial benefits or personal benefits to participating in this research. Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected, and you will not be personally identifiable in the analysis of the information you provide. Additionally, deidentified data may be shared with other researchers in the future. I will take all reasonable steps to protect your identity. If you do not consent to being audio/video recorded, i will take notes on your interview.

Upon completion of the study audio recording and coding data will be stored in a locked file cabinet located in the student services building room 176. Federal or state laws may require us to show information to university or government officials (or sponsors) who are responsible for monitoring the safety of this study. If you wish to withdraw, notify me via email at [sheed@siu.edu](mailto:sheed@siu.edu). You may also contact dr. Saran Donahoo at 618-453-6077 or [donahoo@siu.edu](mailto:donahoo@siu.edu). If you choose to withdraw, any data submitted prior to your withdrawal will be destroyed.

I agree \_\_\_\_ I disagree \_\_\_\_ to participate in this activity and know that my responses will be audio recorded.



I agree \_\_\_I disagree\_\_ that Kristopher Marshall may directly quote me using a pseudonym in their paper.

Your signature indicates your consent to participate in the study and gives consent to Kristopher Marshall to collect, maintain, and report all findings.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Institutional Review Board. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Institutional Review Board Chair, Office of Research Compliance, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale,

IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4534. E-mail [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Protocol

Introductory script: the following scripts will be read to each participant at the beginning of the interview process. Each participant will be provided a consent form at the beginning of each session.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you have been identified as someone who can provide insights into the topic of this research study. The purpose of this study is to understand how first-year at-risk black males perceive their peer mentoring experience and its effects on their peer mentors at a rural PWI. Your responses will be used to improve the peer mentoring experience for students at Southern Illinois University. To facilitate the interview process, i would like to video/audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only myself and my doctoral program advisor will be privy to the recordings, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Please review the consent form.

Essentially, this document states that:

1. All video/audio taped information will be held confidential
2. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable
3. There are no known risks related with this research and there are no financial benefits or personal benefits for participating in this research.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, i have several questions that i would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you to push ahead and complete the interview in time. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns at any time during the interview process, please feel free to ask. If you consent to be video/audio recorded and participate in this study, please review, and sign the consent form provided by the interviewer. Once the consent form is completed the video/audio recording will begin. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Questions

#### Mentee Questions:

1. Describe your perceptions and experiences in your first year at this institution?
2. Describe how peer mentoring impacted your perceptions and experience at this institution?
3. Describe in detail how peer mentoring affected your success or failure in your first year of college?

#### Mentor Questions:

1. Tell me about your experience as a peer mentor at this institution?
2. Describe how acting as a peer mentor to at-risk Black males affected your perceptions and experiences at this institution?
3. How did peer mentoring at-risk Black males affect you personally?

The following follow-up questions will be utilized to clarify statements and/or elaborate on participant responses.

- Can you tell me more about that?
- Can you give me an example of that?
- Can you explain this to me in more detail?
- What do you mean when you say\_\_\_?
- Describe what that was like for you?

**VITA**

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Bachelor of Science, Management, December 2008

Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Master of Science in Education, Workforce Education, August 2011

Capstone Project Approval:

Peer Mentoring Experience of First Year At-Risk Black Males and The Effect of Peer  
Mentoring on Mentors and Mentees at a Rural PWI

Major Professor: Dr. Saran Donahoo