



Impact of Peer Mentoring on Anxiety, Academic Performance, and the Transition into the Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program at the University of Mississippi Medical Center

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this study is to explore student perspectives on the impact of peer mentoring by examining anxiety, academic performance, and successful strategies utilized during the mentor-mentee relationship.

Method: This research study collected descriptive, quantitative data using an electronic survey. The survey was emailed to all first-year OTD students at UMMC and was designed to examine the impact of the peer mentoring program on their transition into the graduate program.

Results: The majority of participants reported positive perspectives of peer mentoring with the program decreasing anxiety (71.4%), improving their academic performance (88%), and no further changes needed to improve the program (over 50%).

Conclusion: This study provides further research and understanding on the impact the UMMC peer mentoring program has on occupational therapy students' anxiety and academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

To make the transition into an unfamiliar setting easier, it is important to have a mentor as a guide. Individuals from various backgrounds attend the Occupational Therapy Doctoral (OTD) program at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC); therefore, a peer mentoring program is very beneficial to help ease the transition of students. To facilitate this process, UMMC created a peer mentoring program that allows first-year students to have excess resources along with a second-year student to guide them into their transition into the graduate program. While the mentees are first-year students, the mentors are second-year students. The mentees and mentors are matched through an informal, randomized selection. The mentors offer assistance to their assigned mentees during their transition into the doctoral program by providing study tips, encouragement, and opportunities for campus involvement. In this way, the goal is that mentees would experience decreased anxiety levels and increased academic performance.

PURPOSE/PRIMARY AIMS

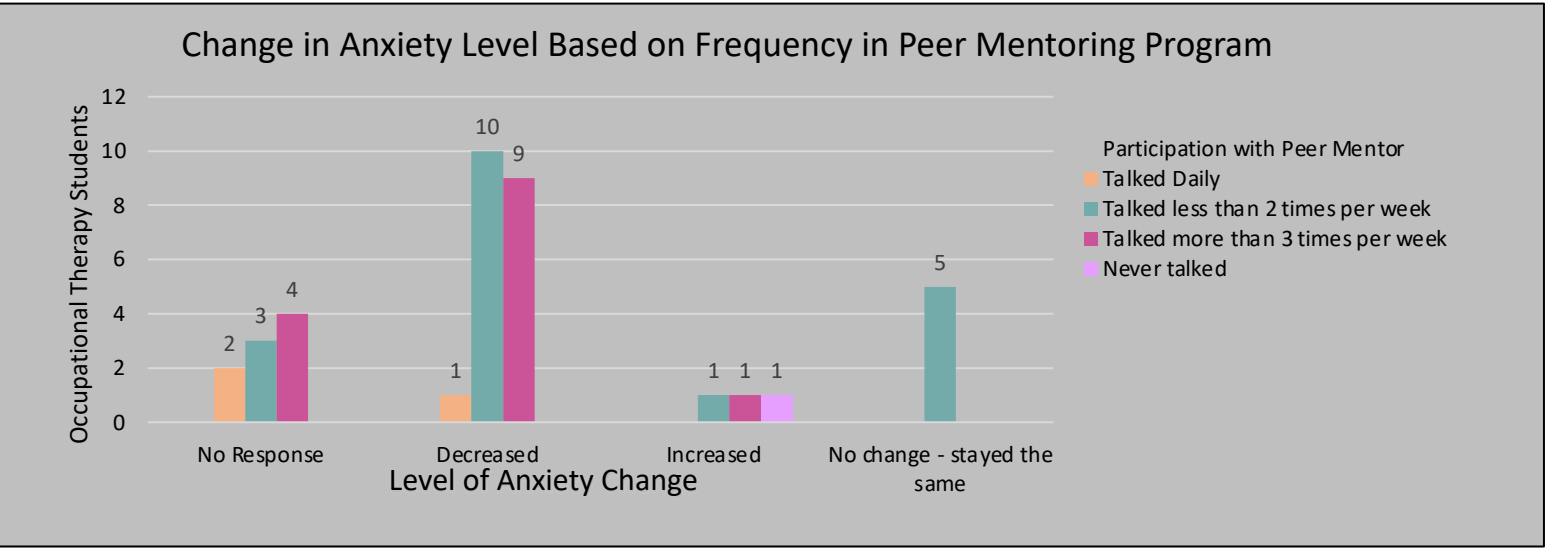
Purpose: To explore student perspectives on the impact of peer mentoring by examining anxiety, academic performance, and successful strategies utilized during the mentor-mentee relationship to provide a guide for the structured peer mentor program in the department of occupational therapy at UMMC.

- Primary Aim (I):** Describe the relationship between students' anxiety and their participation in peer mentoring.
- Primary Aim (II):** Identify specific peer mentoring strategies used to support academic performance.
- Primary Aim (III):** Identify student mentees' perceptions on the implementation of the current UMMC OTD structured peer mentoring program.

RESULTS

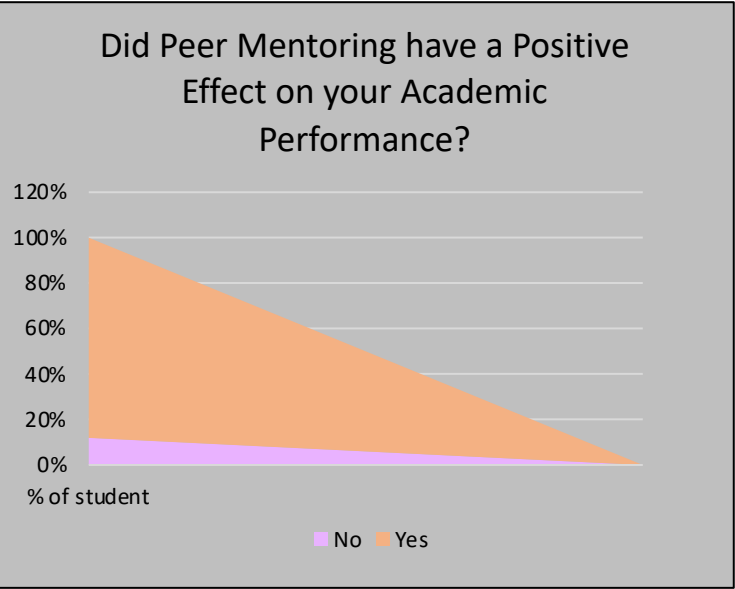
Primary Aim I

Table 2: Students' Reports on Effects of Anxiety with Peer Mentoring



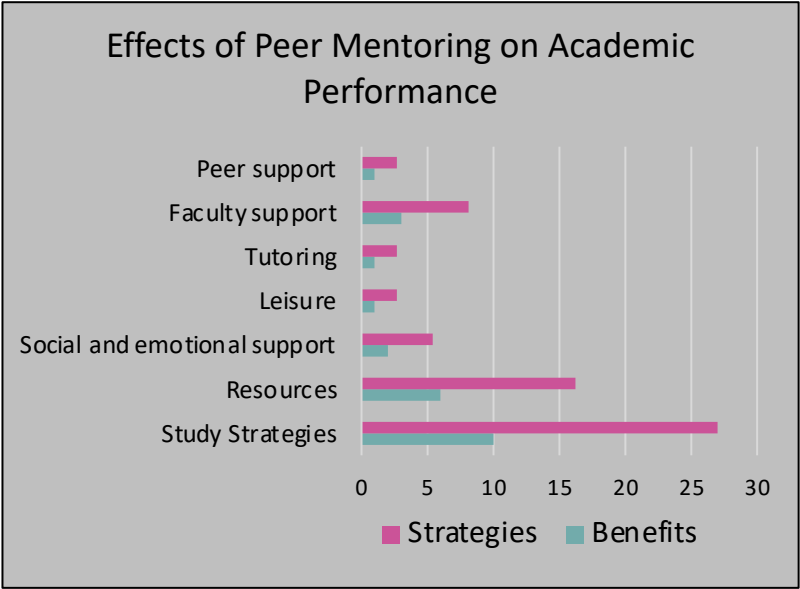
Primary Aim II

Table 3: Students' Reports on Academic Performance with Peer Mentoring



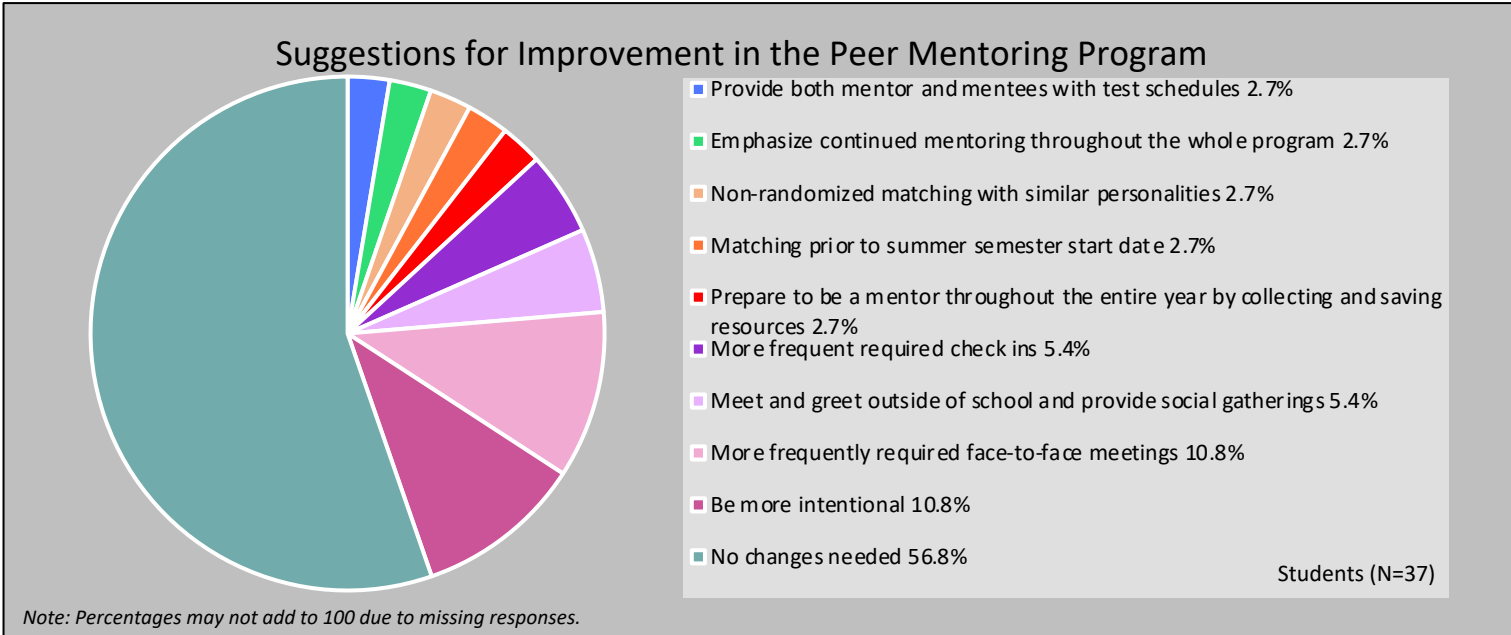
Primary Aim II

Table 4: Students' Reports on Academic Performance with Peer Mentoring



Primary Aim III

Table 5: Students' Perception of UMMC OTD Peer Mentoring Program



METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This quality improvement research study was designed by researchers to gather quantitative data through an electronic survey of occupational therapy students.

Study Participants: Researchers emailed surveys to all first-year OTD students at UMMC.

Data Collection: The survey was emailed directly to students on October 6, 2021. Researchers obtained informed consent based on the student's voluntarily participation. The survey was available to students for one week and took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis: Data was entered and analyzed from the completed electronic surveys using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0.

IMPLICATIONS

- Providing students with peer mentors throughout their time in academia allowed them to have physical resources that they could use to increase their academic performance.
- Active peer mentoring provides students with both physical and emotional support which can decrease students' feelings of anxiety during this transitional period.
- Requiring more frequent and structured time between mentees and mentors can improve the relationship and positive outcomes of the peer mentoring program.

LIMITATIONS

- COVID-19 pandemic impacted class layout of mentors vs mentees.
- Novel survey could limit reliability and validity of data collected.
- Mentor-mentee relationships varied on gender of participants.
- Limitations based on inferences that can be drawn from the data (i.e. inverse relationship between anxiety and academic performance).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this descriptive study offered further understanding of the impact that peer mentoring programs have on students' anxiety and academic performance while transitioning into a graduate program. Our results concluded that 88% of participants reported that participating in the peer mentoring program had a positive effect on their academic performance and 71.4% of respondents reported a decrease in their anxiety. Further research is needed to evaluate the influence of randomization of mentee and mentor pairing on the outcomes of peer mentoring as well as the impact of program duration. Lastly, investigations on the impacts that peer mentoring has on students outside of their academic settings could be beneficial in the development and improvement of peer mentoring programs.