PENNSYLVANIA COUNSELING ASSOCIATION
A Branch of the American Counseling Association

Journal of the Pennsylvania Counseling Association

Volume 26, Number 1 Article 1

Fall, 2024 DOI: https://doi.org/10.71463/TQRE2505

Mentoring: Retaining Students in Counseling Doctoral Programs

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Abstract

Student retention is a growing concern for educators and institutions of higher education. Previous research has suggested that mentoring is an effective strategy for increasing retention of students in counseling programs. The purpose of this article is to present evidence in support of mentoring within doctoral-level counseling programs. Several recommendations are documented.

Keywords: Student retention, mentoring, peer and faculty mentoring, counselor education and supervision, counseling doctoral programs.

Doctoral programs in counselor education and supervision (CES) prepare students for careers in higher education, advanced clinical practice, scholarly research, and professional leadership. Many CES programs are designed to meet the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2024 standards. CACREP (2024) is the predominant accrediting body in the counseling profession whose mission is to promote professional competence in the field. The nature of doctoral programs for counselor education can be rigorous as the overarching goal is to maximize competency of professionals across a variety of domains such as counseling, teaching, research, supervision, leadership, and advocacy (Goodrich et al., 2011; Sink & Lemich, 2018). In addition, Sink and Lemich (2018) emphasized the expectations placed upon doctoral graduates to possess skills in program evaluation in academic and/or clinical environments.

Unsurprisingly, the intensity of CES programs, as well as other obstacles, can impact attrition and retention (Burkholder, 2012). To increase retention rates, mentoring has proved effective in supporting graduate students during the doctoral experience (Holm et al., 2015; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). The purpose of this article is to examine the impact of mentoring on student retention in counseling doctoral programs.

Mentoring in Counseling Doctoral Education

Counseling, as a discipline has integrated mentoring in various aspects of theory and practice (Baltrinic et al., 2018; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Tentoni, 1995). Mentoring has been

commonly defined as a relationship in which a mature and more experienced person commits to guiding a novice in discovering their way personally and/or professionally (Kram, 1985; Maccombs & Bhat, 2020; Sneyers & De Witte, 2018). The process of choosing a mentor can be formal and structured in an institutional setting or informal when the novice reaches out to a mentor for support (Maccombs & Bhat, 2020). Formal mentoring programs are established by the University/ Institution with clearly stated guidelines and expectations of the mentor and mentee within the relationship (Brown & Grothaus, 2019). However, informal mentoring involves forming organic relationships among individuals in a shared discipline in which the more experienced provide psychosocial and career support to the less experienced (Bynum, 2015). Whereas there is an existential emphasis on promoting formal mentoring, some informal mentoring programs have been effective in meeting student goals (Sneyers & De Witte, 2018). In some programs, mentoring is provided by advisors. Despite the importance of this relationship, some students misunderstand the role of advisors. They may imagine the advisor leads the relationship and provides guidance in all situations. Clarification of roles and expectations in mentoring relationships and advising can be valuable to all involved in the process and can influence student retention (Kram, 1985; Sneyers & De Witte, 2018).

Student Retention

Student retention is a growing concern for educators, institutions, and the government (Burke, 2019; Morison & Cowley, 2017; Rio & Mieling, 2012; Tinto, 1999). Research has indicated a 40-50% attrition rate in U.S. doctoral programs (Geven et al., 2018). High dropout rates contribute to poor utilization of departmental resources such as grants, graduate assistantships, and teaching space (Geven et al., 2018; Morison & Cowley, 2017). All doctoral programs engage in a rigorous admissions process to recruit highly motivated and capable students (Burke, 2019; Geven et al., 2018). Therefore, it is expected that doctoral level students will successfully complete the program curriculum (Morison & Cowley, 2017; Tinto, 1999). Over time, a variety of academic and psychosocial factors can influence attrition including juggling full-time work and school, unanticipated medical-related concerns, and family obligations (Boswell et al., 2017; Tinto, 1999). Additionally, it has been noted that some students may temporarily leave programs to tend to personal and professional obligations while others may never return (Holm et al., 2015; Tinto, 1999). Due to these obstacles, students and administrators may implement support strategies, such as mentoring programs, to effectively increase retention and promote success (Boswell et al., 2017; Tinto, 1999).

Most retention studies have predominantly focused on undergraduate programs (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1999). Since these studies focus on attrition and academic success in this population, their data is derived from student success in undergraduate programs. This may not be directly applicable to doctoral level counseling programs since doctoral students are at a different level of study. The gap between admission, retention, and academic success needs further investigation in the counseling literature. Moreover, it is imperative to identify causes of attrition and the prevalent support systems that enhance student retention in counseling doctoral programs. Overall, student retention increases program credibility and utility of resources. Additionally, high graduation rates in counseling programs generate more researchers and educators supporting counselors in training.

Why do Students Leave Counseling Doctoral Programs?

Integration Issues

Traditional attrition models by Bean (1982), Spady (1970), and Tinto (1975, 1993) present a lack of academic and social integration as the main antecedents of student attrition. Academic integration involves formal entities of academic performance (e.g. coursework) and informally interacting with university faculty and staff (Bean, 1982; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1993). Students' social integration includes formal engagement with the social system through extracurricular activities and informal peer group interactions (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1993). These interactions may be the basis of ongoing decisions for students to engage in programs.

Research has shown that the outcome of low integration impacts various student groups differently (Belavy et al., 2020; Gardner, 2009). In his study, Gardner (2009) noted that students who departed graduate programs prematurely experienced more mental health problems. Students were more susceptible to psychological and financial concerns compared to those from high school or undergraduate programs. Individuals, families, and institutions attach greater value to graduate education since it creates more employment opportunities and strengthens financial security (Belavy et al., 2020; Gardner, 2009). These aspects have been seen as efforts towards upward mobility and economic success. Nevertheless, students choose to leave academic programs for several reasons including limited funding, poor advisor-advisee relationships, diverse backgrounds, and gender (Belavy et al., 2020; Burke, 2019; Geven et al., 2018; Holm et al., 2015; Tinto, 1999). Leaving a program may discourage their career ambitions, especially given the challenges faced by students from diverse backgrounds and women in doctoral education.

Financial Reasons

Doctoral programs are very expensive, and most applicants depend on the availability of scholarships, grants, and graduate assistantships (Geven et al., 2018; Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020). When these sources of funding are removed or decreased, most doctoral students are significantly impacted (Geven et al., 2018). Students may choose to leave programs temporarily to engage in full-time employment to raise funds, whereas others may permanently drop out (Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020). In their study with 10 doctoral mothers, Holm et al. (2015) noted that institutional financial resources were a protective factor for the students. They further understood that students were able to refrain from full-time jobs and concentrate on their program. Working may be inevitable to meet their personal and academic needs. Having a flexible part-time job and financial support contributed to retention among doctoral mothers (Holm et al., 2015).

Access to sufficient resources enables students to focus on course requirements while integrating into the academic and social environmental aspects of the program. Ultimately, this process increases their personal and professional development, and ultimately success in the program. Kent et al. (2020) found that doctoral students struggled to balance the need for career growth and financial stability. Students had to consistently think about leaving a doctoral program and having enough finances (Kent et al., 2020). Finances are a critical consideration for attrition and retention.

Advisor-Advisee Relationships

Another aspect that influences attrition of students in counseling doctoral programs is the advisor-advisee relationships (Craft et al., 2016; Tigranyan et al., 2021). Dipre and Luke (2020) identified the positive impact of advising on

academic success and professional development of students, though not all graduate programs prioritize advising. Institutions have differing approaches towards advising and it may only be utilized in certain courses that are being taught, rather than the duration of a graduate program (Dipre & Luke, 2020). The responsibilities and roles of an advisor are determined by their approach. However, all advisors are ethically obligated to be competent when supporting advisees with program completion and be able to address the unique and diverse needs of students (Dipre & Luke, 2020).

Advisor styles typically include developmental and prescriptive advising (Crookston, 2009; Dipre & Luke, 2020). Developmental advising is collaborative and holistic in nature, in which the advisor and advisee determine appropriate roles within the relationship to accomplish vocational and personal goals of the advisee. Additionally, the advisor provides insight and fosters skills to facilitate success (Crookston 2009; Dipre & Luke, 2020). Prescriptive advising is a traditional advisor-advisee relationship that consists of advisors being more directive and informing advisees on academic/course information to help students satisfy curriculum requirements (Crookston, 2009; Dipre & Luke, 2020). Regardless of the strategy, advising can be a crucial source of assistance for advisees who are struggling with doctoral studies (Dipre & Luke, 2020). In fact, many advising relationships may organically evolve into mentoring relationships thus becoming a protective factor from student attrition (Boswell et al., 2017).

Frydman et al. (2019) found that the heavy workload in doctoral programs increases student engagement in negative self-appraisal when obstacles are encountered. Students internalized challenges and associated them to their personal inadequacies rather than the structure and/or steep demands of a rigorous program (Frydman et al., 2019; Tigranyan et al., 2021). These experiences made students question their abilities which influenced their decisions to withdraw. It has been noted that a supportive advising relationship is critical to the success of doctoral students (Craft et al., 2016; Tigranyan et al., 2021).

Vaquera (2007) noted that academic and social integration in the university environment is critical to whether students persist or leave graduate programs. Some students struggle to understand the course content and may not recognize available supports such as library resources, the writing center, and/or student success advisors (Craft et al., 2016; Vaquera, 2007). The social environment may involve interactions with peers which can be challenging for students (Vaquera, 2007). When advisors create more opportunities for student interactions, mentoring is naturally enhanced. This may influence social integration which increases retention and later degree completion (Tinto, 1999).

Advisors can provide academic and social resources for students, along with mentoring opportunities (Boswell et al., 2017; Holm et al., 2015). Holm et al. (2015) found that students valued advisory relationships and utilized their advisors as mentors in the program. Students appreciated guidance related to mitigating stress and making healthy choices to increase success (Holm et al., 2015). Although advisor-advisee relationships can range from being helpful to ineffective, mentoring relationships are naturally positive and developmentally significant to students. When advisory relationships are extremely positive, they can mirror elements of a mentoring relationship. Positive advisor-advisee relationships consist of open communication, respect, and shared career and

research interests (Desmond, 2009; Stark et al., 2019).

Boswell et al. (2017) explained how mentoring relationships can grow organically and be facilitated through trust. Furthermore, studies that explore the nature of advisory and mentoring relationships suggested that mentoring can arise from advisor-advisee relationships when the conditions are adequate (Boswell et al., 2017; Cobb et al., 2018; Craft et al., 2016). Faculty and students can develop a mutually rewarding connection that fosters professional and psychosocial support when respect and trust are built (Boswell et al., 2017). However, when advising relationships are dysfunctional, students do not receive the resources required for success and matriculation in their program (Cobb et al., 2018; Dipre & Luke, 2020). Advising behaviors that can be detrimental to student success can include inaccessibility, lack of empathy, feedback being provided only after error occurs, communication issues, unwarranted focus on accentuating rules and regulations, and an overall absence of guidance (Dipre & Luke, 2020). Some students may personalize these challenges leading to deterioration in academic and mental health outcomes, which can negatively impact retention of students in doctoral programs (Cobb et al., 2018).

Impact of Culturally Diverse Backgrounds

Research has indicated an increased risk for attrition of students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; McCallum, 2017; Morison & Cowley, 2017; Wladis et al., 2018). First- generation graduate students and other minority groups in the United States, including international students, usually lack relatable and accessible academic role models hence increasing their risk (Ju et al., 2020; Morison & Cowley, 2017; Wladis et al., 2018). Unrealistic expectations about social and academic demands of doctoral programs places these students in challenging life circumstances (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; MacCallum, 2017). Some may continue to operate hectic schedules and treat their academic programs as part-time engagements (Brown & Grothaus, 2019). This creates stress when academic and work deadlines are misaligned (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; McCallum, 2017).

Community pressures may override the dreams and motivations of students in these diverse populations (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; McCallum, 2017). Students from highly interdependent communities are impacted by the well-being of their families and personal environment (Brown & Grothaus, 2019). In the case of family members, doctoral students may be divided between academic and personal obligations (McCallum, 2017). Some students end up leaving programs to contribute to the welfare of their family and community (McCallum, 2017). Additionally, students may leave programs out of frustrations without being aware of resources offered by universities (Brown & Grothaus, 2019).

Ju et al. (2020) conducted grounded theory research with 15 faculty members in CES doctoral programs to demonstrate the importance of providing institutional or departmental resources to students from culturally diverse backgrounds. These authors suggested themes related to being proactive and intentional when implementing support and retention strategies (Ju et al., 2020). Ju et al. (2020) recommended that increasing understanding and awareness of student needs and culture, especially if the faculty are from an independent Euro-American background, can be useful when improving retention outcomes.

Culturally diverse students experience high levels of isolation and stress as they undergo the

process of acculturation in CES doctoral programs (Ju et al., 2020). Therefore, inclusion is critical in promoting retention of CES doctoral students. In a related study, Maccombs and Bhat (2020) discussed information that accentuated the importance of faculty in universities who promote a culture of inclusion. This involvement and inclusion were evidenced by participants in Ju et al.'s (2020) study who emphasized the need to provide personalized support to students as a retention strategy. Inclusion may have different meanings for varying institutions and individuals. The priority should be on creating a setting where students feel welcomed and have access to the resources that are available (Ju et al., 2020; Maccombs & Bhat, 2020).

Gender Related Societal Expectations

Gender differences were also identified as considerations when studying attrition (Holmes et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020; Morrison & Cowley, 2017). More females than males have been found to be at risk of attrition (Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020). Given the responsibilities attached to women, they may be overwhelmed by the demands of family and employment, accompanied by enrollment in rigorous doctoral programs (Holm et al., 2015). Morrison and Cowley's (2017) qualitative study with 16 respondents, of which eight were women, reported the impact of gender issues on persistence of women in university programs in Australia. They recommended further research to investigate specific family and childcare-related expectations affecting women in academic programs. Low partner support was a prevalent theme for all the eight women which increased the possibility of attrition (Morrison & Cowley, 2017). Since doctoral studies require a lot of time and dedication, women can persevere with the financial and emotional support of their families.

Women have been found to be resilient and able to manage several roles, however given the considerable stress in doctoral programs, leaving the program may sometimes feel like the only option. (Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020). Kent et al. (2020) found that women becoming mothers during their programs were more likely to drop out or request a time extension for degree completion. Alternatively, due to partner support and less expected involvement in childcare, men have been found to successfully complete their doctoral programs despite working full-time jobs (Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020). With more support available, men may not be as impacted if they become fathers during their enrollment in a doctoral program. These variations in gender role expectations have led to most women requiring more support from advisors and faculty members to succeed in doctoral programs (Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020).

Mental Health Issues

Mental health is also a significant consideration of students who leave academic programs (Bishop, 2016; Cobb et al., 2018; Kent et al., 2020; Schudde, 2016). Some students may join doctoral programs with a preexisting mental health condition such as anxiety or depression (Bishop, 2016; Kent et al., 2020). Mental health challenges predispose students to dysfunctional progress in doctoral programs in addition to the expected mental distress (Kent et al., 2020). Mental health is a critical component of student integration and retention (Bishop, 2016; Schudde, 2016). Moreover, since the role of preparing students for success through retention and graduation lies with faculty, students and institutions, counselor educators are devising strategies that have been proven successful (Cobb et al., 2018). One of the methods that has been found to increase retention and success are formal faculty and peer mentoring programs (Cobb et al., 2018; Kent et al., 2020).

Mentoring to Increase Graduate Student Retention

Mentoring

Counselor educators use mentoring in clinical supervision for students to experience the expectations of their profession as future practitioners (Tentoni, 1995). There is a continual evaluation of compatibility between the student and the clinical practice role (Tentoni, 1995). In addition, through mentoring, students receive support from their dissertation chairs to counter challenges leading to persistence in counseling programs (Baltrinic et al., 2018; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). To accomplish their work with students, counselor educators adopt different styles of mentoring. More specifically, mentors may be facilitators, supervisors, and evaluators (McKibben et al., 2018; Baltrinic et al., 2018). They improvise strength-based approaches and provide support and feedback to increase student learning.

Choosing mentees is crucial in the mentoring relationship (Afolabi, 2011; Desmond, 2009; Sugimoto, 2012). Mentors, especially in formal mentoring programs, make an evaluation of their skills, time, and willingness to support a particular mentee in their personal and professional development (Desmond, 2009). Conversely, mentees often look for specific characteristics in mentors such as shared intellectual interests, a good reputation, and the ability to motivate them to attain their personal and professional goals (Afolabi, 2011; Sugimoto, 2012). In CES programs, the length of experience in the profession equips a mentor with skills in the core areas of counselor education (Casto et al., 2005; Solomon & Barden, 2016). Therefore, CES doctoral students can find support for their personal and professional development.

Mentoring as a Developmental Process

Developmental models of mentoring have focused on student needs as they progress in their programs (Holm et al., 2015; Kram, 1985; Sugimoto, 2012; Tentoni, 1995). For example, earlier in the academic life of doctoral students, their focus is on personal goals, and they progressively transition into focusing on professional development (Sugimoto, 2012; Tentoni, 1995). A mentoring relationship provides feedback, advice, collaboration, and evaluation of mentee work (Sugimoto, 2012).

Mentors through processes of critical reflection provide constructive feedback to mentees (Tentoni, 1995). Mentors are open to professional dialogue which may entail being critiqued by their mentees which reduces power imbalances (Sugimoto, 2012). Additionally, mentors consistently model professional expectations to benefit mentees when they transition into mentoring others (Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020). These intentional mentoring strategies may counter attrition and increase doctoral student retention and graduation in Counseling doctoral programs (Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020).

Mentors in counselor education programs prepare scholars with a holistic outlook in the service of academia, profession, and society (Baltrinic et al., 2018; Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020; Maccombs & Bhatt, 2020; Ramsey et al., 2002). Ramsey et al. (2002) further described mentoring as a safe avenue to prepare students for success in the culture of academia and counselor education. They learn the efficacy of maintaining and balancing their future roles of teaching, research, and community service (Baltrinic et al., 2018; Ramsey et al., 2002).

Additionally, mentoring in Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs has been identified as a protective factor by

providing support to vulnerable students (Holm et al., 2015). Mindful and supportive mentors help students deal with the realities of their current burdens (e.g., financial insecurities) increasing persistence in doctoral programs (Kent et al., 2020). Holm et al. (2015) further noted that some mentors provide emotional support and phone accessibility. Most students perceived these behaviors as communication of care and value for student success. Overall, as students feel supported, it positively impacts retention and a representation of the quality of the CES program.

Gatekeeping Role in CES and Mentoring

Faculty mentors continue to advocate for gatekeeping as an ethical obligation because professional competency difficulties are common in CES programs, even though retention is one of the objectives. Chang and Rubel (2019) interviewed counselor educators about their gatekeeping experiences using a qualitative grounded theory technique. Using the collected data, researchers put forth a core internal experience of trying to be an effective gatekeeper, which they divided into four internal experiences: integrating identities and juggling responsibilities, exercising discernment, managing difficult emotions, and recognizing cohesion and capability in colleagues (Chang & Rubel., 2019). In a pilot study, five doctoral students were questioned about their experiences as gatekeepers, the educational process, and how they manage their various professional tasks. Results presented gatekeeping experiences, a process with multiple gates, learning to gatekeep, mostly through experience and overcoming obstacles, and multiple professional roles in gatekeeping, centered on teaching, supervision, and the influence of faculty mentors (Charnley, 2021).

Strategies for gatekeeping and remediation may include consulting with other CES professionals, directly addressing problems with supervisees, and augmenting live supervision (Freeman et al., 2016). As CES mentors, DeCino et al. (2022) concluded that the bioecological system theory (in which development occurs through interactions within various social contexts) is crucial for assisting doctorate students with creating sophisticated and contextually aware perspectives on gatekeeping. In their role as mentors, CES faculty intentionally observe the interaction of gatekeeping and psychological safety along a continuum (Harrichand et al., 2022). On the contrary, Rapp et al. (2018) reported a discrepancy between the established value of gatekeeping in CACREP standards (2024, 6.B.2., 6.B.3.) and doctoral students' comprehension of its development and training. The authors recommended further research into doctoral student gatekeeping development and training in response to this understanding (Rapp et al., 2018). The authors also explored the effects of gatekeeping training in counselor education and offer training and curriculum recommendations that are grounded in academic literature.

Faculty Mentoring Programs

Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) proposed the concept of persistence in counselor education to describe students who continue through a doctoral program, despite obstacles and stressors. The faculty-student relationship was identified as a crucial component of student success that contributed to perseverance (Burkholder, 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Effective faculty mentoring can be described as a relationship that offers support, guidance, and encouragement while showing students empathy during the doctoral experience (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Faculty engagement with students both in and out of class is valuable.

Protivnak and Foss (2009) explored how doctoral students find it helpful for faculty mentoring to include opportunities beyond the classroom to grow professionally (such as collaborative research and/or co-teaching). Although professional development is the core focus of a mentoring relationship, students can also experience psychosocial growth. Students can receive feedback and support from mentors regarding personal experiences, the transition into the role of a doctoral student, and concerns that accompany the numerous roles a student may balance (Boswell et al., 2017, Casto et al., 2005). However, research also suggested that relationships with faculty can negatively impact a student's experience if not managed carefully (Burkholder, 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Students may contemplate leaving doctoral programs or postpone their plans to persist.

Faculty interactions and departmental culture have been documented as factors that can impact a doctoral student's experience in a counselor education program (Burkholder, 2012; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Although students contribute to a department's culture, faculty members play a pivotal role in the development and reinforcement of a program's atmosphere. Protivnak and Foss (2009) explored the reactions of counselor education students that encountered unhelpful components that negatively impacted their experience. Students have reported that faculty with limited availability to be present for students beyond the classroom was detrimental to learning. Additionally, other responses have included the importance of faculty being receptive to student feedback and open communication of needs/wants (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Advisor-advisee relationships that are deficient do not support the meaningful growth of mentoring connections that can evolve between faculty and doctorate students. Furthermore, poor interactions with faculty can influence students to withdraw from the counselor education program (Burkholder, 2012). Research has accentuated the significance of a supportive and cohesive environment within a doctoral program, including connection with faculty and peers (Burkholder, 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

Faculty mentoring can be an advantageous opportunity for students that promotes academic and professional growth (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Stark et al., 2019). Students can benefit from formal and informal mentoring relationships with faculty members (Kolbert et al., 2002; Stark et al., 2019). However, faculty as mentors may not be a realistic option for all counselor education programs. Staff shortages may interfere with programs being able to assign each student a faculty mentor. Furthermore, faculty members' own courseloads and job responsibilities (teaching, advising, research, etc.) can make it challenging to provide mentees with adequate mentorship. With evidence of peer mentoring being an effective strategy for students, peer mentoring may sometimes be another viable alternative to faculty mentoring, for counselor education programs (Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020).

Peer Mentoring Programs

Another successful mentoring program that contributes to retention is between peers. Peer mentoring is a relationship between a senior and a junior student in which the upperclassman provides guidance on navigating the degree requirements (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Muschallik & Pull, 2016). Most institutions have either formal or informal mentoring programs, though they may lack proper documentation (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Muschallik, & Pull, 2016). The differences between informal and formal mentoring programs are of significance.

Some studies present positive results pertaining to student productivity in informal mentoring relationships (Lin, 2014). Muschallik and Pull (2016) concluded in their studies that informal mentoring programs facilitate peer relationships.

Since mentoring is based on a social constructivism ideology, mentees have the potential to make meaning of knowledge and interactions (Gamel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; St. George & Robinson, 2011). The role of a mentor is to not have expectations of the mentee's needs and accomplishments, but rather, to promote growth and respond accordingly to the mentee's goals (St. George & Robinson, 2011). Mentoring that emphasizes the mutuality of the relationship contributes to the transformation of the mentee, mentor, and mentoring relationship (Gamel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016). As peers provide academic and psychosocial support to others, they are motivated to persist in their own program (Gamel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016).

Furthermore peer-mentoring involves an intentional relationship between two members at the same level where the more experienced member provides psychosocial support, role modeling, and vocational guidance to the protégé (Maccombs & Bhat, 2020). It serves a purpose for student retention when the peers are part of orientation in counseling doctoral programs. Specifically, peer mentoring relationships provide resources to increase student choice to persist in doctoral programs (Holm et al., 2015). Mentors and mentees with the same advisor share resources related to the program and managing their emotions (Holm et al., 2015). Mentees learn from peer mentors because they find them relatable and more understanding (Kent et al., 2020). Peer mentors can provide this support which increases the probability of persistence among counseling doctoral students (Holm et al., 2015; Kent et al., 2020).

Conclusion

As identified by research studies from diverse fields (engineering, medicine, and education), mentoring has the potential to increase student retention in graduate programs. Additionally specific to CES programs mentoring can be utilized in a bid to align with 2024 CACREP standards for doctoral student training, such as engaging in scholarly activities and advocacy (CACREP, 2024, 6.A.2, 6.B.3). As noted, counseling students in mentoring relationships can maintain better mental health, which enhances their stability as students and increases retention in the program (Boswell et al., 2017; Holm et al., 2015; Snow & Field, 2020). Overall, research studies provide empirical evidence for the role of mentoring in increasing student retention in academic programs and, more specifically, in counseling education and supervision doctoral programs.

Conclusively, with the potential for increasing retention in counseling doctoral programs, coordinators, chairs, and college deans need to build systems that are focused on strengthening faculty mentoring processes and utilizing peer mentors. University administration may need to engage in continuous follow-up of their students so that enrollment, retention, and graduation rates are consistently examined. It is worth noting that these efforts may not be the only strategies for increasing student retention since the current CES doctoral student population is diverse (Holm et al., 2015; Snow & Field 2020). Factors such as diversity, gender, national, or international status are influential to CES doctoral students' response to retention efforts. Additionally, the type of mentoring programs (informal or formal) may culminate differing outcomes for students of CES doctoral programs (Boswell et al., 2017; Ju et al., 2020).

Providing accurate data through research will enhance faculty and peer mentoring programs in counselor education and supervision. Gathering data from both the students persisting in the programs and those that have dropped can inform mentoring practices across disciplines. In addition, institutions will better utilize the available resources to promote mentoring programs. Mentoring is cost-effective and has the potential to be beneficial to both mentors and mentees.

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