

# MENTORING CONNECTIONS

Evaluating the University at Buffalo's School  
of Social Work's Mentor Program

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Josal Diebold, Graduate Assistant

Wooksoo Kim, MSW PhD, Associate Professor

Denise Krause, LCSW-R, Clinical Professor, Associate Dean of Community  
Engagement and Alumni Relations

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*Mentoring Connections:  
Evaluating the University at Buffalo's School of Social Work's Mentor Program*

The University at Buffalo School of Social Work (UBSSW) Mentor Program began in August 2011 in order to build relationships between MSW students and UBSSW alumni. Through a unique mentorship model of linking current students and interested alumni, students connect to the wider social work profession and alumni to their alma mater.

The purpose of the current project is to evaluate the UBSSW Mentor Program in terms of participant satisfaction and its goal of cultivating a connection between the university and wider social work community.

In general, the findings suggested:

- Mentors and mentees anticipated more frequent meetings than actual number of meetings during the year.
- Mentors and mentees expected to engage in similar activities, including informal meetings and conversations.
- Mentors and mentees both reported to have engaged in similar activities, including informal meetings and conversations.
- Mentors and mentees had different expectations for and experiences of guidance/benefits of the program.
- Majority of mentees found the program to be somewhat helpful or very helpful to their academic success.
- Majority of mentors and mentees found the program somewhat helpful or very helpful in helping them feel connected to the UBSSW.
- Half of mentors and mentees found the program moderately successful as a catalyst to strengthen the relationship between the UBSSW and the social work community.
- More than half of mentors and mentees felt the program has considerable potential to strengthen the relationship between the UBSSW and the social work community.

Based on these findings, we recommend:

- Provide mentors and mentees a commitment form as a guide to a mutual and tentative plan including the ways and the frequency of communications, goals for the relationship, and potential activities.
- Plan several additional gatherings for Mentor Program participants throughout the school year.
- Provide easily accessible orientation materials to mentors and mentees at the beginning and throughout the year.
- Send out periodic e-mails with refresher materials, such as conversation topics or possible gatherings.

This study also provides the opportunity for stakeholders in the UBSSW and social work community to discuss the meaning of the data and recommendations for moving forward.

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## OVERVIEW

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### **Mentorship Defined**

Mentorship is inherently interactional and can be as unique as the individuals involved. Most mentor-mentee relationships involve learning, networking, emotional affirmation, logistical support, and guidance in real-world applications of knowledge (Keller et al., 2014). Mentors possess experience, expertise, and wisdom, which they use to foment the development and growth of their less-experienced mentees (Howe & Daratsos, 2007). As such, mentorship has tremendous implications for professional development and training.

Pomeroy and Steiker (2011) posited that, although mentoring is undoubtedly valuable and widespread in many professions and disciplines, it is of particular importance in social work. Growing into a skilled social worker is practice-based and on-going; students and newly minted practitioners learn by actively doing and applying their knowledge and skills. Consequently, they stand to reap immeasurable benefits from the modeling, wisdom, and practical tips given by experienced workers. Damaskos and Gardner (2015) elucidated the need for a cultural shift toward mentorship in social work, so as to ensure the longevity and maturation of the profession.

### **Forms of Mentorship in Social Work**

Because mentoring is a multidimensional endeavor, there are a number of ways it has been modeled in social work, including:

- A clinical intervention used with clients (Boddy, Agllias, & Gray, 2012)
- A tool for students and novice practitioners in the field (Abramson & O'Brien-Suric, 2016; Howe & Daratsos, 2007; Leonard et al., 2015; MacSporran, 2015; McLaughlin & Grantz, 2012; Pomeroy & Steiker, 2011)
- A particular relationship between faculty and students (Gutiérrez, 2012; McLaughlin & Grantz, 2012; Riebschleger & Cross, 2011; Slivinske, 2012)

### **The Substance of Mentorship**

Mentorship is highly significant for a student or novice inasmuch as the relationship foments their growth, learning, and competency in the social work field (McLaughlin & Grantz, 2012). In a productive, healthy relationship, mentees have opportunities for:

- Learning evidence-based interventions
- Developing their skills in navigating organizations, thinking critically and analytically, and dealing with co-workers, supervisors, clients, and other stakeholders (Riebschleger & Cross, 2011)
- Receiving guidance in pursuing meaningful careers (Riebschleger & Cross, 2011)
- Applying their social work courses and learning into real-time interactions and day-to-day tasks
- Self-reflection (Pomeroy & Steiker, 2011).
- Getting support emotionally, psychologically, and mentally (McLaughlin & Grantz, 2012).

Mentors take on a variety of roles as “coach, sponsor, guide, and teach[er]” (Riebschleger & Cross, 2011). In turn, they also gain a sense of satisfaction, connection, and motivation in the mentoring relationship (Abramson & O’Brien-Suric, 2016). In the context of mentorship, mentors have the chance to:

- Play a vital function in maintaining the integrity and longevity of social work as a body of knowledge and robust profession
- Help avoid perpetual ‘reinventing the wheel’ and fuel creative innovation (Damaskos & Gardner, 2015).
- Feel a renewed commitment to the field
- Be revitalized and stimulated by helping to prepare the next generation of social workers

### **Barriers to Mentorship**

The literature points out that not all mentor-mentee relationships are created equally; that is, the extent to which mentoring is constructive, useful, and continuing can differ (Keller et al., 2014). In other words, mentorship may not live up to its intended form and function.

Time, attitudes, and expectations may act as barriers to successful mentorship. If either mentors or mentees are busy or overwhelmed, they may struggle to find the time or emotional reserves to truly invest in the relationship (Keller et al., 2014). They may have divergent objectives or goals that they desire to work on within their mutual interactions (Keller et al., 2014). The level of dedication and investment may also not align. If the mentor or mentee is unsure or indifferent towards the relationship, growth and development will be considerably stymied (Keller et al., 2014). Moreover, not only do mentors need to stay apprised of new and emerging information in the field, but they also must maintain a firmly rooted faith and sense of morale in the profession itself. Otherwise, the mentor will unlikely be able to provide the support, resources, and encouragement needed to make the mentoring relationship thrive.

### **Successful Mentorship**

Mentor and mentee personalities, perspectives, and shared connection can all be protective factors in mentoring. Specifically, individuals who are consistently open to learning, innovation, and creativity will be more likely to fully invest in mentorship (Boddy et al., 2012). Mentors and mentees need to be able to have honest, collaborative interactions with one another, feeling safe enough to bring their genuine selves to the relationship (Boddy et al., 2012). Because mentorship is, by nature, interactive and relational, it requires a respectful and accepting atmosphere in order to prosper. Moreover, connectedness is highly conducive to mentorship in the sense that belonging meets mentees’ most fundamental needs and provides a supportive platform from which to grow (Allen & Eby, 2007).

### **Directions for Future Work**

In terms of social work and mentoring, much of the literature is anecdotal, highlighting an important area for future work. Well-designed studies and scholarly research are needed in order to measure the nature, significance, and benefits of mentoring – both for mentees and mentors (McLaughlin & Grantz, 2012). Rather than subjective points-of-view and personal conjecturing on advantages, barriers, and nuances, data is needed in order to operationalize and delineate important components of mentorship. In addition, the literature is sparse in regards to less-traditional mentor-mentee matches outside the realm of faculty-student and



seasoned staff-neophyte worker. Egan and Cockill (2012) suggest that alumni, in particular, are valuable mentors for university students, especially in the business arena. However, as of our reading, there is no mention of the same possibility in social work literature. The University at Buffalo School of Social Work Mentor Program has been built on the premise that social work students, too, have an opportunity to draw on the expertise and support of program graduates, who have both been in their shoes and been in the field.

The purpose of the current project is to evaluate the UBSSW Mentor Program in terms of participant satisfaction and its goal of cultivating a connection between the university and wider social work community.

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## PROGRAM HISTORY & DESIGN

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The University at Buffalo School of Social Work (UBSSW) Mentor Program began in August 2011 in order to build relationships between MSW students and UBSSW alumni. The catalyst for the program came from annual surveys of students and alumni. In these surveys alumni noted that they wanted to have meaningful and specific connection to UBSSW. At the same time, students commented that they hoped for more connections to social workers in non-evaluative ways and for more opportunities to network. Social Work literature provided little to no guidance on establishing connections between social work alumni and students outside of the formal avenues. Other disciplines including law, business, and health sciences have been successful in this endeavor and the UBSSW program developers relied on these to formulate an initial plan. Multiple stakeholders weighed in on the program design and the program began in the 2011-2012 school year with more than eighty matches.

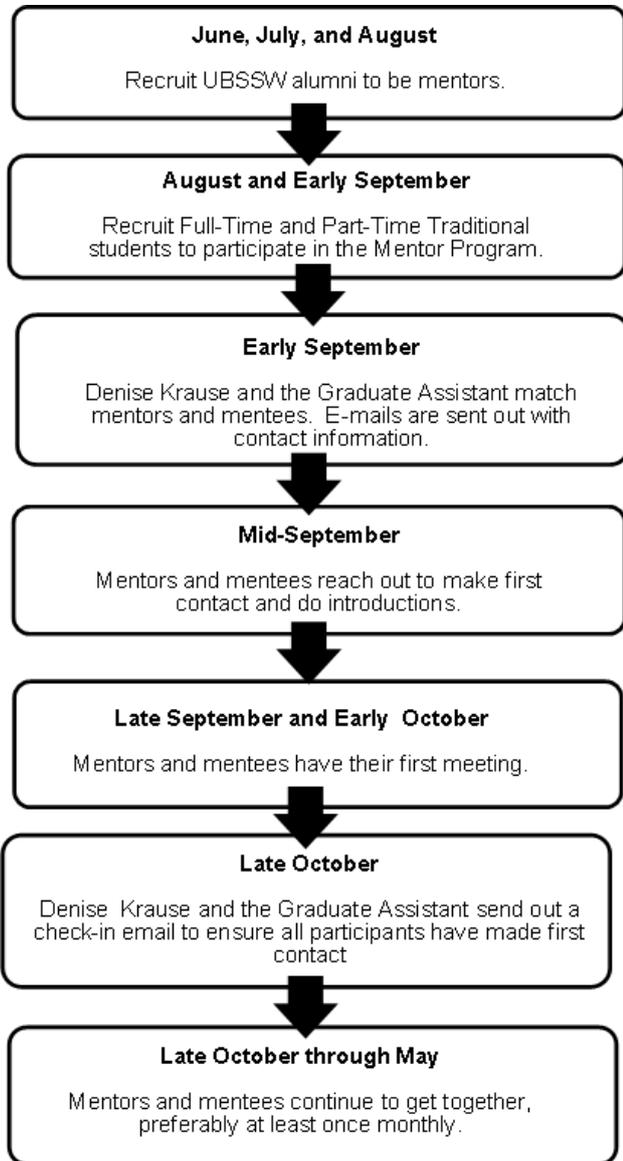
Through this current mentorship model of linking incoming students and interested alumni, students connect to the wider social work profession and alumni to their alma mater. In the six years of the program roughly 360 matches have been made involving roughly 346 mentors. Evaluation and growth are hallmarks of the UBSSW Mentor Program. The experiences, insights, and thoughts of students and alumni are vital in identifying the aspects of the program that are beneficial, effective, and salient to their needs and expectations. Evaluation surveys are sent to mentors and mentees in the beginning and end of each academic year. The surveys provide the occasion to reflect on their anticipations, hopes, opinions, lived experiences, and level of satisfaction when entering and terminating their official time in the Mentor Program. Consistent evaluation allows for on-going improvement, fine-tuning, and expansion. Over the six years, changes have been made based on this feedback. Examples of changes include: moving from an in-person orientation to a recorded whiteboard animation that can be accessed at any time; expanding the program to include incoming advanced standing students; creating easily accessible online forms; and offering a “thank you” workshop on a variety of topics for mentors (in person and online) where they can earn continuing education credits for free.

Developed as a method for engaging school of social work alumni in unique and meaningful ways, this program has provided alumni with the opportunity to mentor current MSW students through informal conversations, career guidance, and participation in school and community social work functions. Students participating in the mentoring program have had opportunities to interact with practitioners who are currently working in the field, and have learned about some of the strategies that mentors have utilized to successfully navigate their own careers.

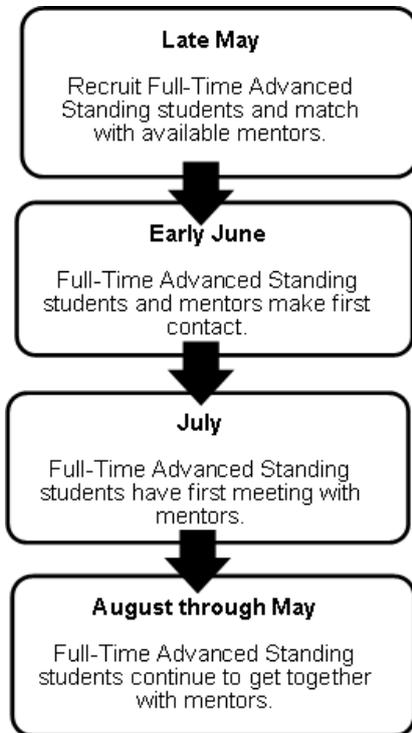
Figure 1 on the following page breaks down the timeline for an academic year of the UBSSW Mentor Program for traditional (Full-Time and Part-Time), Full-Time Advanced Standing, and Part-Time Advanced Standing students.



### Traditional Students



### Full-Time Advanced Standing Students



### Part-Time Advanced Standing Students

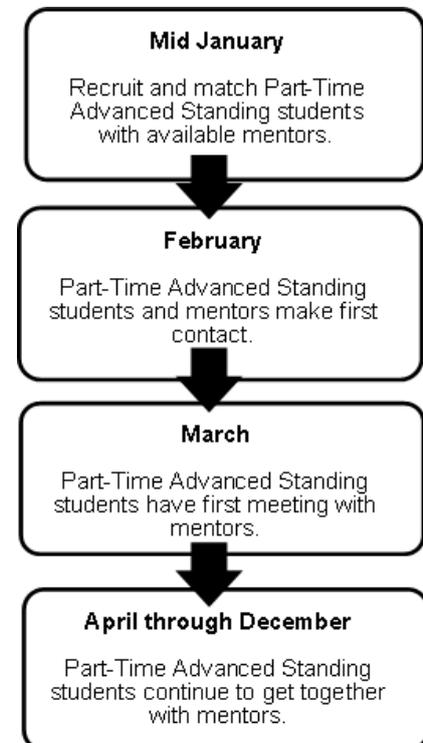


Figure 1. Mentor Program Timeline

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## METHODS

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### **Mentor Program**

**Procedures.** Beginning in June or July, Denise Krause, Associate Dean of Community Engagement and Alumni Relations, and her Graduate Assistant begin to recruit mentors via email. One email is sent to the entire alumni database and additional emails are sent to affinity groups, including the last year's mentors and the most recent cohort of UBSSW graduates.

Mentors are able to sign-up by completing a form and returning it to Denise or the Graduate Assistant. The form may be completed on Microsoft Word and emailed back. Alternatively, it may be filled out by-hand, then scanned and e-mailed or simply mailed in. Beginning in 2017, there is an option to sign-up online on the UBSSW Mentor Program webpage. Returning mentors do not have to fill out the sign-up form again. Instead, they notify Denise or the Graduate Assistant of their continued interest and just provide updated contact information.

As the mentors sign-up or recommit, their information is entered into the Mentor Program database for mentors. On the Master List, new mentors and updated contact information are added and changed. The information for each mentor is also put onto a separate sheet in the database specifically for that academic year's mentors (i.e., 2016 Available Mentors).

Traditional Full-Time and Part-Time students are recruited beginning in late August and early September. The Graduate Assistant attends the new student Orientation to recruit. Students have a sign-up form provided in their Orientation folders and are able to sign up that day or later. If they wait to sign up, students can either scan and email the form to Denise or the Graduate Assistant, or they can drop it off at Denise's office on campus. Additional recruitment is done by sending two to three emails to the MSW listserv reminding new students to sign up. Like the mentors, students have the option of signing up online beginning in 2017 through the Mentor Program website. All student information is organized into a different Mentor Program database for mentees. In the mentee database, sheets are separated by student status and year. For instance, all traditional (full-time and part-time) students for one academic year are organized into a sheet. Advanced Standing students are organized on separate sheets, as they begin the program at a different time.

In early-September, Denise Krause and the Graduate Assistant meet in order to match mentors and mentees. They first identify any mentors or mentees who made special requests, such as wanting someone in the same geographical region. After completing those matches, the remaining matches are made based on mutual interests.

Within 72 hours, all mentors and mentees receive an e-mail notifying them of their match. Name and contact information is provided, as is a link to the YouTube Mentor Program Orientation video and a pdf document outlining the guidelines of the program.

In January, Part-Time Advanced Standing students are recruited entirely via e-mail. By the end of January, they are paired with mentors who were not matched with a student in September. Similarly, in late May, Full-Time Advanced Standing students are recruited. The Graduate Assistant does attend their Orientation/Welcome dinner to encourage participation, in addition to sending out emails. They are also matched with mentors not matched the previous Fall. These matches are made by mid-June.

**Participants.** The program is specifically designed for incoming students. All UBSSW alumni are eligible to participate in the Mentor Program. The number of participants fluctuates year to year. In the 2016-2017 academic year, 80 students and 115 mentors signed up to participate.

## **Program Evaluation**

**Procedures.** Mentor Program participants are notified of the study via e-mail, given access to a secure online survey form, and offered the opportunity to participate in the study by completing the form prior to a specified date.

Pre-test surveys are sent out by mid-September, at the time that matches are first made for traditional students. Three follow-up emails are sent weekly to remind participants to complete the survey. Post-test surveys are sent out in mid to late May at the conclusion of the official academic year. Similarly, three follow-up emails are sent as reminders.

In each email, participants are informed of the nature of the study and provided with contact information that may be used in the event of questions or concerns. Participants are informed that their participation is voluntary and they can choose to skip a question or discontinue the study at any time. Each survey (both pre-test and post-test) takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The only identified risk for participants is a potential breach of confidentiality concerning whether or not they completed the survey. To mitigate this risk, all the data is downloaded and stored on a secure, password-protected server. Additionally, information regarding who participated in the study is not disclosed to any individuals outside the research team.

**Sample.** All students and mentors participating in the UBSSW Mentor Program are eligible to participate in the pre-program and post-program evaluation surveys. Participation varies from year to year. In the 2016-2017 academic year, 39 mentees and 77 mentors completed the pre-test; 26 mentees and 57 mentors completed the post-test.

**Measures.** At the pre-test, data is collected on gender, race/ethnicity, and geographic location for both mentors and mentees. Mentees are also asked their student status and whether they are in the online program. Mentors are asked their graduation year. The remaining questions ask mentors and mentees to anticipate how often they will interact with their match and the activities they will engage in. Mentors are asked to identify areas they expect to guide their mentee and mentees are asked the areas they expect to benefit from.

At the post-test, the same demographic data is collected on gender, race/ethnicity, geographic location, student status, and graduation year. Mentors and mentees are then asked to report how frequently they met with their match, what activities they engaged in, and the areas of guidance/benefits they experienced. In addition, mentors and mentees are asked which area of guidance/benefit was most important, whether the program helped them feel connected to UBSSW, whether the program is a successful catalyst for the university-community connection, and the potential the program possesses in strengthening the university-community connection. Mentees are also asked to what extent the program helped in their academic success as first year students.

**Analyses.** The primary analytic purposes are to describe baseline information on the experience of mentors and mentees in the Mentor Program. The level of satisfaction in the program will be compared within individuals (pre- and post-test) and between mentors and mentees.

## FINDINGS

### **Program Demographics**

The following data reflects all mentors and mentees who signed up for the Mentor Program in the academic years 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017.

**Gender.** The overwhelming majority of both mentors and mentees in the Mentor Program identify as female.

**Table 1: Mentors' Gender**

	2014 N=60	2015 N=73	2016 N=106	Total N=239
Female	55 (91.7%)	65 (89.0%)	96 (90.6%)	216 (90.4%)
Male	5 (8.3%)	8 (11.0%)	10 (9.4%)	23 (9.6%)

**Table 2: Mentees' Gender**

	2014 N=55	2015 N=94	2016 N=78	Total N=227
Female	49 (89.1%)	84 (89.4%)	69 (88.5%)	202 (89.0%)
Male	6 (10.9%)	10 (10.6%)	9 (11.5%)	25 (11.0%)

**Race and Ethnicity.** Race and ethnicity has not been collected through the Mentor Program sign-up form for mentees. Starting in 2017, however, mentees have the option of providing this information.

Since 2014, 78.9% to 92.0% of mentors identify as White (non-Hispanic) and 1.1% to 12.3% identify as Black or African American.

**Geographic Region.** Overall, approximately 50% of mentors in the Mentor Program selected the Buffalo Region as their geographic region, and around 25% selected 'other.'

The majority of mentees also selected the Buffalo Region (60.5% of total mentees). However, the second most common geographic area for mentees was the Buffalo Southtowns (15.9% of total mentees).

**Student Status.** Overall, 79.6% of mentees were either Full-Time or Part-Time, and the remaining were Full-Time Advanced Standing or Part-Time Advanced Standing.

**Table 3. Mentees' Student Status**

	2014 N=61	2015 N=106	2016 N=69	Total N=236
Full Time	38 (62.3%)	53 (50.0%)	37 (53.6%)	128 (54.2%)
Part Time	14 (23.0%)	19 (17.9%)	27 (39.1%)	60 (25.4%)
FT Advanced Standing	8 (13.1%)	30 (28.3%)	2 (2.9%)	40 (16.9%)
PT Advanced Standing	1 (1.6%)	4 (3.8%)	3 (4.3%)	8 (3.4%)

**Graduation Years.** Mentors' graduation years range from 1967 to 2016, with the greatest number of mentors graduating between 2011 and 2015.

**Evaluation Demographics**

**Respondents.** The following data is specific to the participants who completed pre and post-program surveys. Response rate was highest in the 2016-2017 academic year, with 48.8% mentees and 67% mentors completing the pre-program survey and 32.5% mentees and 49.6% mentors completing the post-program survey.

**Table 4. Number of Respondents**

	2014- 2015		2015-2016			2016-2017		
	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>n*</i>	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>n*</i>	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>n*</i>
Mentee	11 (18%)	61	45 (40.9%)	15 (13.6%)	110	39 (48.8%)	26 (32.5%)	80
Mentor	27 (27.8%)	97	59 (48%)	28 (22.8%)	123	77 (67%)	57 (49.6%)	115

\*total participants

**Gender.** Since 2014, both mentors and mentees were 80% to 90% female in each year.

**Race and Ethnicity.** Since 2014, 86.6% of mentors identified as White (non-Hispanic). Latino-Latina/Hispanic was the second most frequently identified category and ranged from 3.6% to 5.1%.

Overall, 76.2% to 84.3% of mentees identified as White (non-Hispanic) and 6% to 9.8% identified as Black or African American.

**Geographic Region.** Since 2014, approximately half of mentors selected the Buffalo Region. The category 'other' was selected with the second highest frequency (21.4% to 27.4%). The majority of mentees also selected Buffalo Region (61.9% to 67.3%) or other (14.3% to 15.4%).

**Student Status.** Most mentee respondents were either Full-Time Traditional (56.9% to 61.9%) or Part-Time Traditional (25% to 35.3%). Among Full-Time Advanced Standing students, 11 total completed the pre-program survey and 2 completed the post-program survey. No Part-Time Advanced Standing students completed the pre-program survey, and 2 completed the post-program survey.

**Graduation Years.** Since 2014, the graduation years among mentors at the pre-program survey ranged from 1974 to 2016, with the highest peak at 2015. At the post-program survey, graduation years ranged from 1970 to 2016. Though the majority graduated between 2009 and 2015, the highest frequency was 2003.

## Frequency of Connections

### Mentors

- At the beginning of the year, the majority of mentors anticipated connecting with their mentee about **once a month**:
  - 2015: 33.9% selected once a month and 1.7% selected once a semester
  - 2016: 43.4% selected once a month and 0% selected once a semester
  - Total: 39.3% selected once a month and .7% selected once a semester
- However, at the end of the program year, the majority of mentors reported connecting with their mentees **once a semester** or **two to three times a semester**:
  - 2014: 48% selected once a semester, and 28% selected once a month
  - 2015: 48.1% selected once a semester and 33.3% selected once a month
  - 2016: 42.3% selected two to three times a semester and 17.3% selected once a month
  - Total: 30.8% selected once a semester, 25% selected two to three times a semester, and 24% selected once a month
- Compared to pre-program expectations, mentors ended up connecting with their mentees (via email, phone, face-to-face meetings, etc.) with less frequency than anticipated.

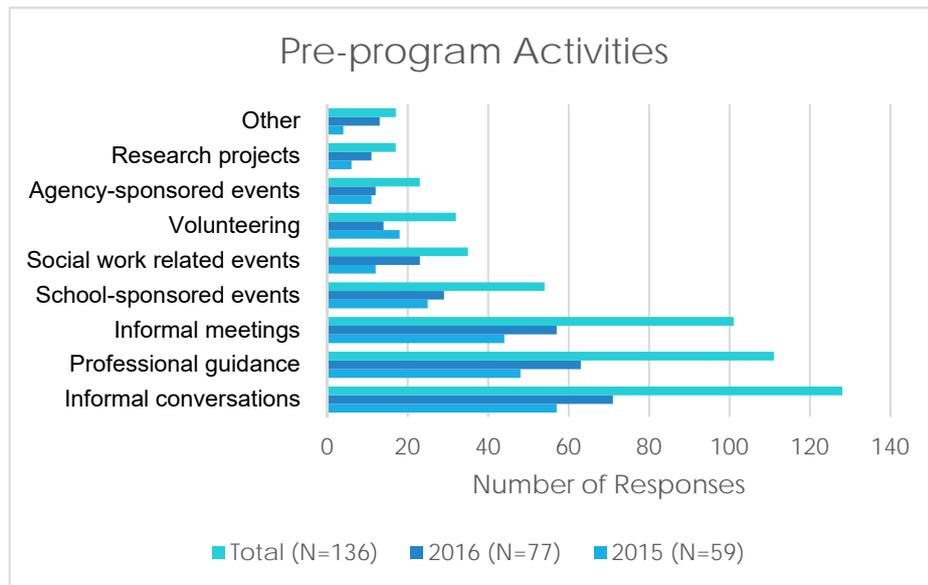
### Mentees

- At the start of the year, the majority of mentees also anticipated meeting with their mentor **once a month**:
  - 2015: 40.9% selected once a month and 2.3% selected once a semester
  - 2016: 46.2% selected once a month and 10.3% selected once a semester
  - Total: 43.4% selected once a month and 6% selected once a semester
- Generally, at the end of the year, mentees reported meeting **once a semester** with greater frequency than anticipated:
  - 2014: 30% selected once a semester and 40% selected once a month
  - 2015: 40% selected once a semester and 33.3% selected once a month
  - 2016: 40% selected once a semester and 32% selected once a month
  - Total: 38% selected once a semester and 34% selected once a month
- The post-program percentage of meeting once a semester was notably higher than pre-program expectations.
- **In all, mentors and mentees seemed to anticipate meeting (by phone, e-mail, or in-person) more frequently than they ended up doing throughout the program year.**

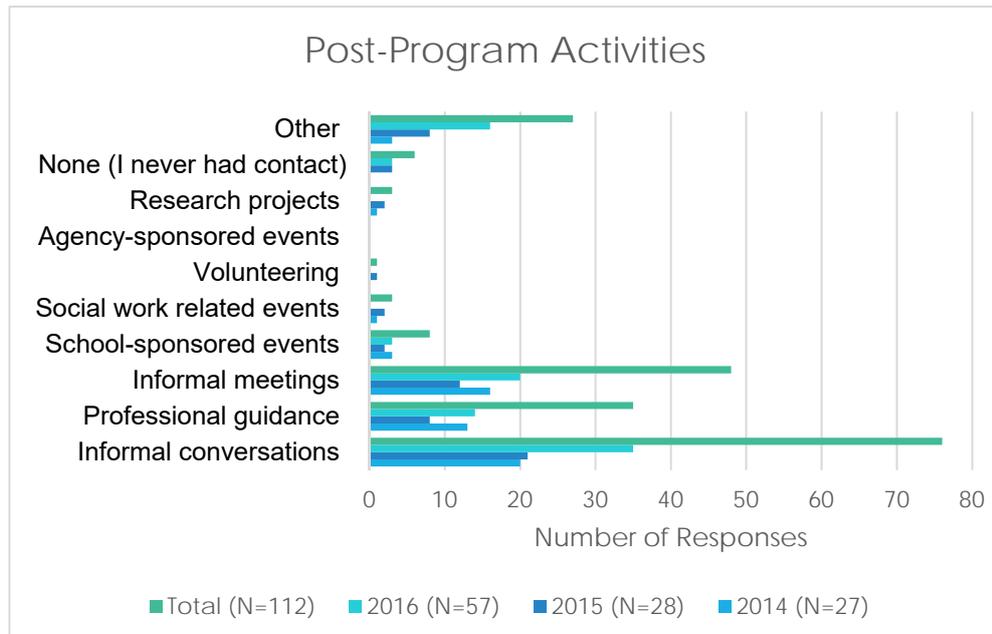
## Activities

### Mentors

- In total, the top three activities mentors hoped to engage in with their mentees were **informal conversations, professional guidance, and informal meetings**.

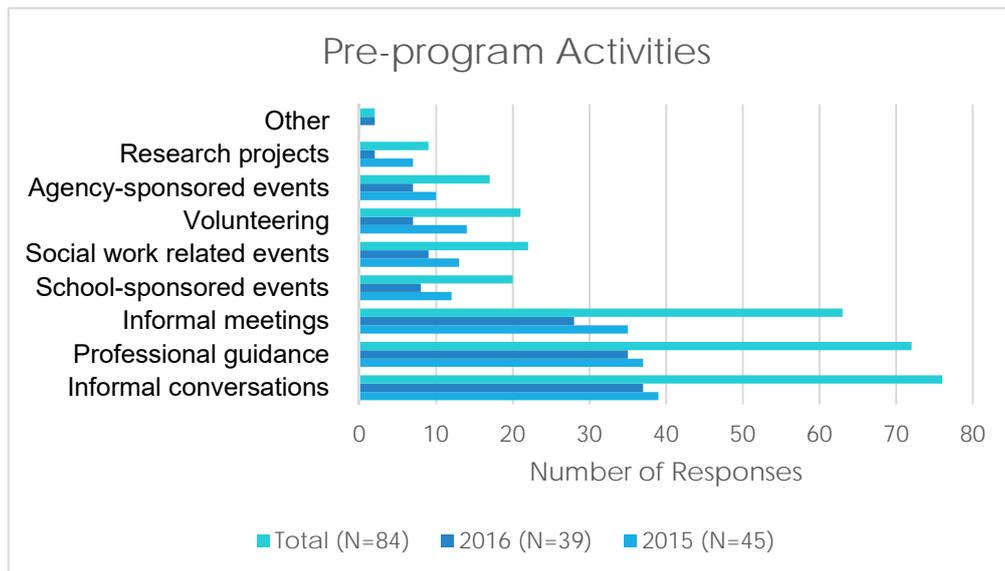


- At the end of the program, the top three activities reported mirrored pre-program expectations.

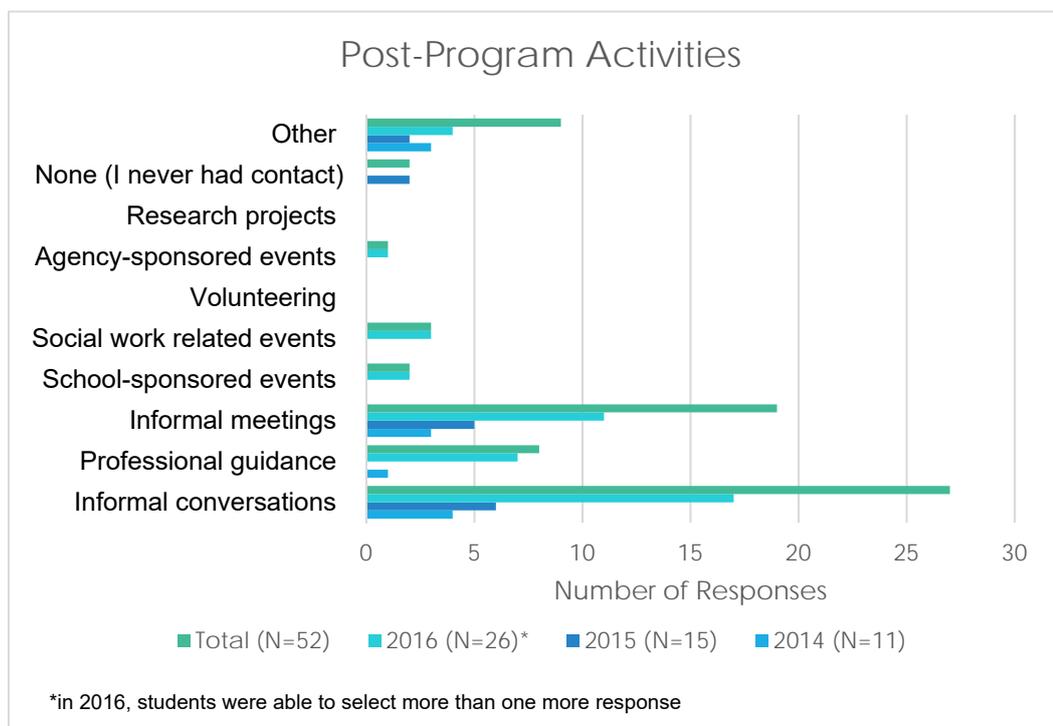


## Mentees

- Similar to mentors, mentees hoped to engage in **informal conversations, professional guidance, and informal meetings** with their mentors at the start of the program.



- After the program, mentees identified **informal meetings and informal conversations** as the most frequent activities they engaged in with their mentors.

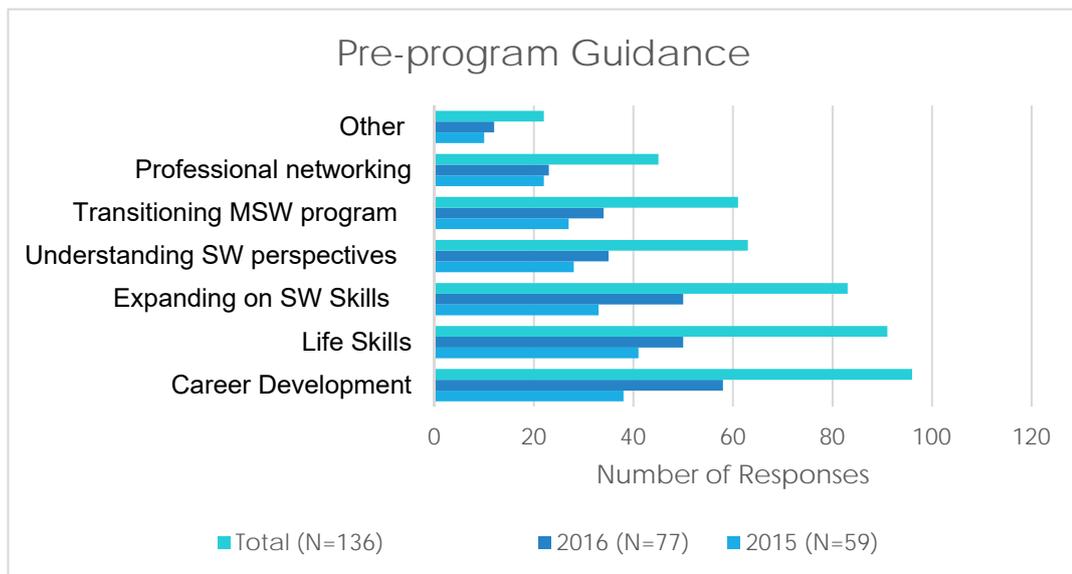


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- Overall, mentors and mentees expected to engage in informal meetings and conversations when they started the program year. Likewise, both areas were the most frequently reported activities at the post-program survey.
  - Among the mentees who responded to the post-program survey, few engaged in research projects, agency-sponsored events, volunteering, social work related events, or school-sponsored events with their mentors.
  - Despite professional guidance being a significant activity to mentors and mentees at pre-program, few mentees (n=8) identified it as an activity they engaged in with their mentor at post-program.

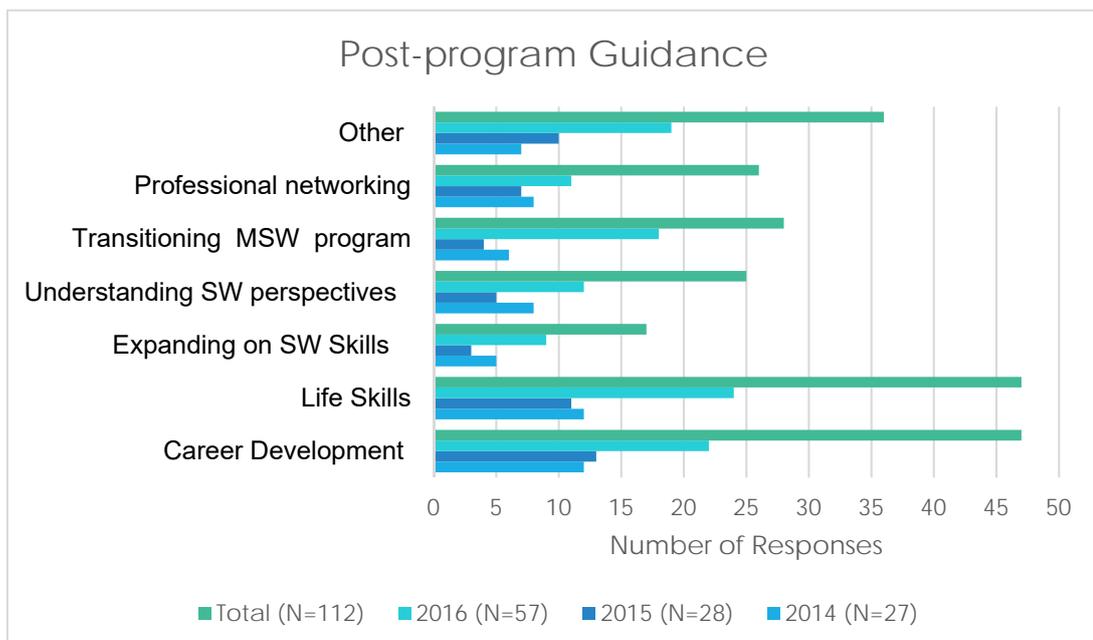
## Areas of Guidance and Benefit

### Mentors

- Before the year began, the overall top three areas that mentors anticipated guiding their mentees were **career development, life skills, and expanding social work skills**.

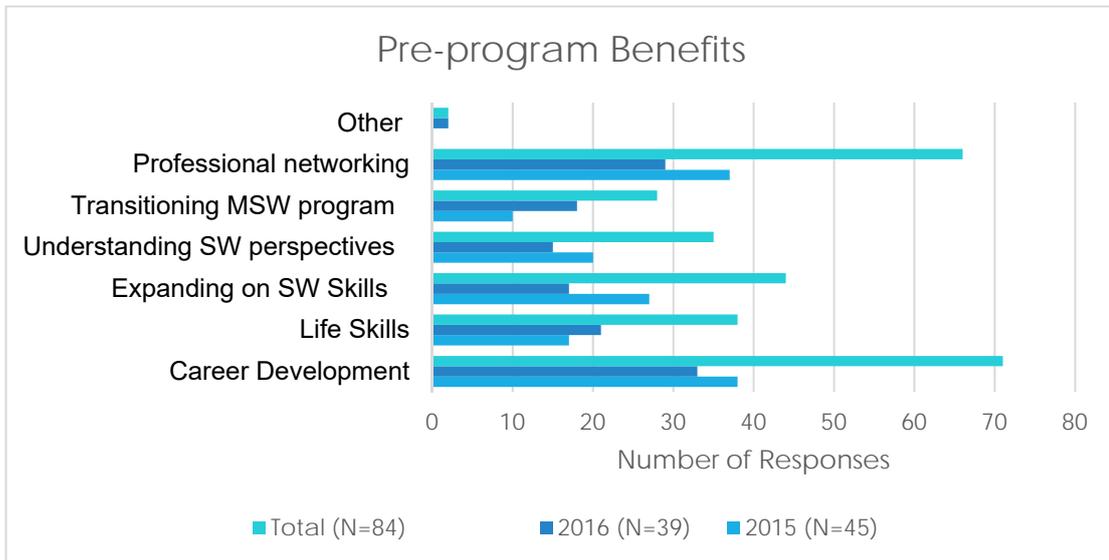


- At the end of the program year, mentors identified **career development and life skills** as the two most common areas in which they guided their mentees. However, expanding social work skills was reported with the least frequency.

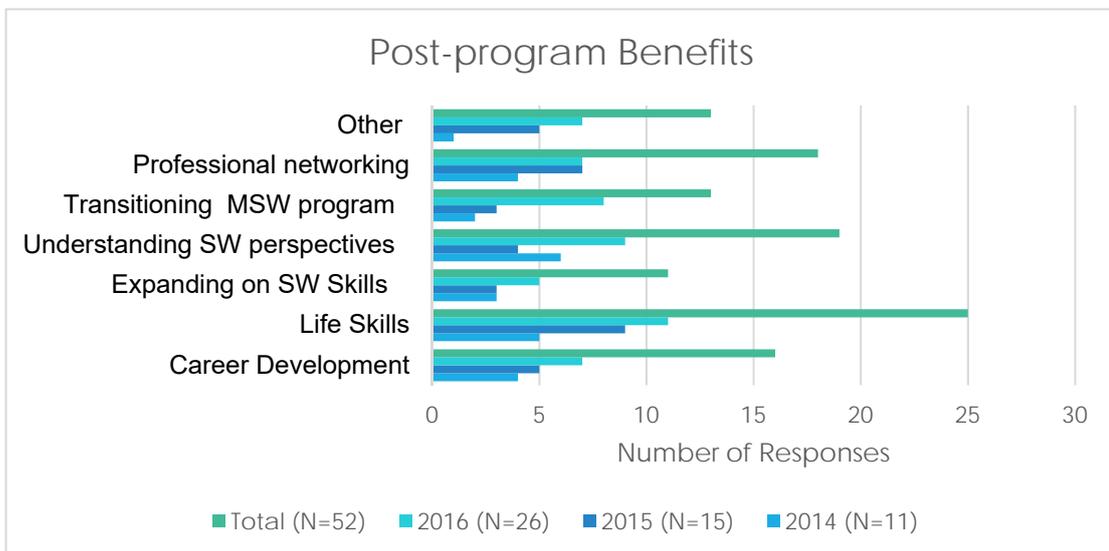


## Mentees

- Overall, mentees anticipated benefits in **career development, professional networking, and expanding social work skills** at the start of the program year.



- After the program year, mentees identified **life skills, understanding social work perspectives, and professional networking** as the areas in which they benefited most.



- **Both mentors and mentees anticipated expanding social work skills to be a significant area of guidance in their relationship. However, in both cases, it was not common at post-program.**
- **Career development was anticipated as being an important area for both mentors and mentees, as well. Although mentors still identified it as an area where they guided their mentees, it was not in the top benefits reported by mentees at the end of the year.**
- **Mentors did not select professional networking as an area of guidance at the pre-program or post-program survey. On the other hand, mentees selected it at both time-points.**
- **Although mentees did not anticipate being benefited in life skills, they did identify it as an important area at the end of the program. Additionally, mentors identified life skills as significant before and after the program.**

### Other Benefits

Mentors and mentees were asked to describe any additional benefits of participating in the Mentor Program. Their responses fell into five categories: connection and inspiration, support and giving back, specific benefits, perspective and experience, and barriers.

- **Connection and inspiration.** Mentors derived meaning from their connection with beginning social workers. They found engaging with students to be advantageous in staying on top of the trends in social work and current events, as well as being aware of changes and developments at the UBSSW. Mentees mentioned connection and inspiration less often, but acknowledged the helpfulness of having someone they could readily contact.

*It keeps me connected with UB. Also keeps me connected to new issues that students are learning about in the program --also how the SW program has changed over the years. (Mentor, 2015-2016)*

*This program allows me to feel like I was not alone (Mentee, 2014-2015)*

- **Support and giving back.** Mentors repeatedly mentioned the benefit of being able to give back to the school by guiding, supporting, and mentoring current students. They expressed the significance of being able to provide encouragement and help to their mentees as a way of paying-it-forward. Mentees found the mentoring relationship to be “enjoyable, informative, and help[ful].” They were greatly aided by their mentors’ encouragement and feedback, particularly in terms of managing stress and other school-related difficulties.

*It renews my commitment to paying it forward, in appreciation of all those who mentored and helped me along my way. (Mentor, 2016-2017)*

*It was great to have someone who...could help when I was struggling with a concept or with something school related. (Mentee, 2015-2016)*

- **Specific Benefits.** Mentors expressed the benefits of assisting students in particular areas, such as identifying career options and teaching needed skills. They used their expertise to instruct and lead their mentees in specific areas of practice and knowledge.

Mentees' responses resonated with the mentors, as they reported the advantages of learning certain skills, talking about their ideas, and garnering assistance with academic tasks, such as papers.

*I also enjoy networking and have helped students wishing to obtain interviews in the New York City area secure those interviews. I enjoy this very much. (Mentor, 2016-2017)*

*...my mentor was especially helpful with reading my papers and giving me suggestions (Mentee, 2015-2016)*

- **Perspective and experience.** Mentors reported the value of using their lived experience, expertise, and perspective from the field in their relationship with mentees. Students' expressed the advantage they gained from their mentors' experience and perspective. They could learn about struggles and fulfilling aspects of being in the field from someone outside of the academic program.

*It gives me a chance to...pay it forward by sharing what I have learned as a social worker for 46 years. (Mentor, 2015-2016)*

*It was nice to talk with someone who had gone through the program and was out working in the field. (Mentee, 2016-2017)*

- **Barriers.** Mentors also mentioned barriers to benefits, especially in terms of staying engaged with their mentees. They acknowledged that some mentees may have not been ready – or in need of – mentorship, while others were so busy with schoolwork, they did not have the time to stay linked with their mentors. The mentors also reflected the limitations of having a relationship with a disinterested or hard-to-contact student. Students mentioned barriers less often, though they did acknowledge that there was, at times, a dearth of communication between their mentor and themselves. They also recognized the barrier of busy schedules – both their own and their mentors'.

*I am not sure that [my mentee] understood how to use a mentor -- I could have done a better job reaching out to her but felt as though the relationship should be initiated by the mentee because if she was not interested (or did not have time) for the relationship, it would not be necessary or effective. (Mentor, 2016-2017)*

*I did not have contact with my mentor after...October, I think things got too busy... (Mentee, 2014-2015)*

## **Academic Success**

Mentees were asked how helpful the program was to their academic success as foundation year students.

- 2014: The majority of students either found the program to have been somewhat helpful (3, 27.3%) or very helpful (3, 27.3%).
- 2015: The majority found the program to have been somewhat helpful (6, 46.2%).
- 2016: Similarly to 2014, most students found the program somewhat helpful (7, 30.4%) or very helpful (7, 30.4%).
- Total: Overall, nearly 60% of students found the program to be somewhat helpful or very helpful.

**Table 5. Academic Success**

	2014 N=11	2015 N=13	2016 N=23	Total N=47
Not helpful at all	1 (9.1%)	2 (15.4%)	4 (17.4%)	7 (14.9%)
Not helpful	2 (18.2%)	1 (7.7%)	3 (13.0%)	6 (12.8%)
Somewhat helpful	3 (27.3%)	6 (46.2%)	7 (30.4%)	16 (34.0%)
Very helpful	3 (27.3%)	2 (15.4%)	7 (30.4%)	12 (25.5%)
Extremely helpful	2 (18.2%)	2 (15.4%)	2 (8.7%)	6 (12.8%)

## **Feeling Connected to UBSSW**

Both mentors and mentees were asked how helpful the program was in helping them to feel connected to the UBSSW.

- Overall, over 75% of mentors found the program somewhat helpful or very helpful.

**Table 6. Mentors: Connection to UBSSW**

	2014 N=26	2015 N=28	2016 N=54	Total N=108
Not helpful at all	2 (7.7%)	3 (10.7%)	2 (3.7%)	7 (6.5%)
Not helpful	3 (11.5%)	1 (3.6%)	5 (9.3%)	9 (8.3%)
Somewhat helpful	10 (38.5%)	18 (64.3%)	29 (53.7%)	57 (52.8%)
Very helpful	7 (26.9%)	6 (21.4%)	13 (24.1%)	26 (24.1%)
Extremely helpful	4 (15.4%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (9.3%)	9 (8.3%)

- Among mentees, about 60% found the program somewhat helpful or very helpful.

**Table 7. Mentees: Connection to UBSSW**

	2014 N=11	2015 N=14	2016 N=23	Total N=48
Not helpful at all	1 (9.1%)	3 (21.4%)	4 (17.4%)	8 (16.7%)
Not helpful	2 (18.2%)	2 (14.3%)	4 (17.4%)	8 (16.7%)
Somewhat helpful	2 (18.2%)	7 (50.0%)	8 (34.8%)	17 (35.4%)
Very helpful	4 (36.4%)	2 (14.3%)	6 (26.1%)	12 (25.0%)
Extremely helpful	2 (18.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.3%)	3 (6.3%)

### **Program as Catalyst**

Mentees and mentors were also asked how successful the Mentor Program is as a catalyst to strengthen the relationship between the UBSSW and the social work community

- In total, around 50% of mentors felt the program is moderately successful as a catalyst. Approximately another 30% chose very successful.

**Table 8. Mentors: Program as Catalyst**

	2014 N=25	2015 N=27	2016 N=52	Total N=104
Not successful at all	1 (4.0%)	2 (7.4%)	2 (3.8%)	5 (4.8%)
Not successful	4 (16.0%)	1 (3.7%)	4 (7.7%)	9 (8.7%)
Moderately successful	8 (32.0%)	17 (63.0%)	28 (53.8%)	53 (51.0%)
Very successful	10 (40.0%)	6 (22.2%)	15 (28.8%)	31 (29.8%)
Extremely successful	2 (8.0%)	1 (3.7%)	3 (5.8%)	6 (5.8%)

- Half of the mentees felt the program is moderately successful. About an additional 30% felt it was very or extremely successful.

**Table 9. Mentees: Program as Catalyst**

	2014 N=11	2015 N=14	2016 N=23	Total N=48
Not successful at all	1 (9.1%)	3 (21.4%)	2 (8.7%)	6 (12.5%)
Not successful	1 (9.1%)	1 (7.1%)	2 (8.7%)	4 (8.3%)
Moderately successful	4 (36.4%)	9 (64.3%)	11 (47.8%)	24 (50.0%)
Very successful	2 (18.2%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (30.4%)	9 (18.8%)
Extremely successful	3 (27.3%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (4.3%)	5 (10.4%)

## **Program Potential**

Mentors and mentees were asked how much potential the program has to strengthen the relationship between the UBSSW and the social work community.

- Most mentors (56.5%) selected considerable potential.

**Table 10. Mentors: Program Potential**

	2014 N=26	2015 N=28	2016 N=54	Total N=108
No potential at all	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.9%)	2 (1.9%)
Some potential	5 (19.2%)	1 (3.6%)	3 (5.6%)	9 (8.3%)
Moderate potential	3 (11.5%)	5 (17.9%)	11 (20.4%)	19 (17.6%)
Considerable potential	12 (46.2%)	17 (60.7%)	32 (59.3%)	61 (56.5%)
Extreme potential	5 (19.2%)	5 (17.9%)	7 (13.0%)	17 (15.7%)

- The majority of mentees (57.1%) also selected considerable potential.

**Table 11. Mentees: Program Potential**

	2014 N=10	2015 N=15	2016 N=24	Total N=49
No potential at all	0 (0.0%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (4.2%)	2 (4.1%)
Some potential	1 (10.0%)	2 (13.3%)	3 (12.5%)	6 (12.2%)
Moderate potential	1 (10.0%)	1 (6.7%)	5 (20.8%)	7 (14.3%)
Considerable potential	5 (50.0%)	9 (60.0%)	14 (58.3%)	28 (57.1%)
Extreme potential	3 (30.0%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (4.2%)	6 (12.2%)

## Suggestions for Improvement

Mentors and mentees were asked for their suggestions for improving the Mentor Program, which fell into five categories: trainings and suggestions, coordinated events and meetings, improved matches, lack of connection, and positive experiences.

- **Trainings and suggestions.** Mentors frequently suggested the inclusion of more structured guidance or training for program participants, including information, instruction, and training for both mentors and mentees. Students also suggested having trainings and tips for mentors on how to effectively connect with mentees.

*...a continuing education session for those who have mentored more than 1 or 2 students, sending periodic messages and social work-specific articles through a listserv. (Mentor, 2016-2017)*

*I think it is important for the mentor to know how they can be of assistance to the student prior to contacting the student. I was looking for suggestions regarding balance between full-time work and part-time school. My mentor wanted to speak with me about how to obtain work, which really did not apply to me. (Mentee, 2015-2016)*

- **Coordinated events and meetings.** Mentors suggested having additional group events and gatherings throughout the year to bring together mentors and mentees. The students also suggested having more scheduled, pre-planned events throughout the year for informal conversation and professional networking.

*More group gatherings. Possible speakers. Could be a professor. Don't need high profile speaker. Don't need full dinner. Could experiment with brief get-togethers on campus. It's a fine balance since all are extremely busy. (Mentor, 2016-2017)*

*The mixer was really great, I think having another event halfway through the year to help people connect would be an added bonus. (Mentee, 2015-2016)*

- **Improved matches.** Both mentors and students made suggestions regarding mentor-mentee matches. In particular, they conveyed the need to closely attend to geography, interests, and availability when pairing mentors with students. Additionally, they reflected the need for there to be mutual desire and interest in having a mentoring relationship.

*Only provide mentors to students who have a true interest in developing a relationship with one. (Mentor, 2015-2016)*

*I think if I was able to connect with someone locally I would have found the program much more beneficial. (Mentee, 2016-2017)*

- **Lack of connection.** Many mentors expressed difficulty making tangible suggestions due to the limited engagement they had with a mentee during the program year. Students also conveyed barriers to continuing the mentoring relationship, particularly due to geographic distance and different perspectives on mentoring.

*I believe however...the demands of her courses and internship increased, the communications lessen [sic]. I reached out several times and did not hear back from the student in the later part of the year. Perhaps the distance deters consistent communication. (Mentor, 2016-2017)*



*With the demands of the program, as well as life I found it difficult to meet with my mentor and take full advantage of what she could offer me. (Mentee, 2016-2017)*

- **Positive experiences.** Some mentors offered no suggestions, instead stating that the program was a great resource and highly beneficial for all participants. Likewise, a few students expressed how helpful and rewarding they found the program and thus, did not have any suggestions for changes.

*Its a great program- the first year I did it I was happy to have a mentee who was active in the collaboration...Keep it running. It has awesome benefits. (Mentor, 2015-2016)*

*I don't have any. I got a very good mentor and had a rewarding experience. (Mentee, 2015-2016)*

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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Based on the pre and post-program data and a follow-up focus group with mentors, the following recommendations are being made for the UBSSW Mentor Program.

### Structure and Expectations

- Commitment form
  - Mentors and mentees can complete a commitment form at the beginning of the program year to establish how they will communicate, the frequency of communications, goals for the relationship, and potential activities.
- First meeting
  - Mentors and mentees ought to meet face-to-face, if possible, for the first meeting.
- Planned gatherings
  - Have three to four planned gatherings for Mentor Program participants throughout the school year, including one specifically for the first meeting. Events could be very simple, providing a structured way for mentees and mentors to interact with one another and meet others, as well.
  - For the annual mixer in the Fall, have mentors personally invite their mentees. Help mentees know they are welcome and encouraged to attend, even if their mentor is not going to make the event.

### Resources

- Mentor “do’s and don’ts”
  - Have experienced mentors provide input on the document “The Mentor Role: What it is and is not.” Make the revised document easily available to all mentors (see Q&A or FAQ Online Resources)
- Orientation materials
  - Provide easily accessible orientation materials to mentors and mentees at the beginning of the year. The current guidelines are long, wordy, and cumbersome and do not appear to be utilized. However, they contain important instructional information that can be transformed into a more digestible form (using bullets, visuals, etc.).
  - The YouTube Mentor Program Orientation video is a very informative, easy to watch resource. It is unclear whether it has been utilized by participants. Monitoring the view count on YouTube can give a better understanding as to whether folks are opening and watching it.
  - Training and instructional materials can include information on mentoring (i.e., infographic), conversation starters, role expectations, phases of the program year, and other tips and guidance on how to connect in a mentoring relationship.
- Monthly e-mails
  - Send out periodic e-mails with refresher materials, such as conversation topics or possible gatherings. Again, information in the existing guidelines can be included in these emails.
  - Early in the program year, one monthly e-mail can contain guidance on how to manage an unresponsive mentor or mentee.
  - Monthly e-mails can also serve to remind mentors and mentees about their agreed upon commitment forms.

- Q&A or FAQ Online Resources
  - Information about the program, as well as mentor “do’s and don’ts” can be provided for mentors and mentees on the UBSSW Mentor Program webpage. It can also provide resources on conversation starters, phases of the program, and what to do if a match is not responding.

### **Successful Mentoring**

- Mentors may be uncertain how much to reach out to unresponsive or aloof students. Mentors should be encouraged to reach out to Denise Krause and the Graduate Assistant with concerns or questions, particularly in light of less-than-satisfactory relationships.
- Clearly defining success in the Mentor Program may help to inform and support mentors, as well. Explicitly define success for mentors as being a consistent presence and support for mentees, regardless of the number or depth of contacts. Lack of response of a mentee is not an indication of the quality, willingness, or commitment of the mentor.

### **Program Potential**

- Mentors and mentees responded very positively to the potential of the program to strengthen the university-community partnership. On the other hand, their perception of the program’s success as a catalyst in this partnership was lower. The gap between potential and actual experience needs to be addressed. Mentors and mentees can be asked directly what would cultivate a stronger sense of the program’s success in their experience.

### **‘Long-Distance’ Mentoring**

- Mentors and mentees seem to be somewhat unaware of the meaning of ‘long-distance mentoring,’ indicating less-than-satisfactory relationships due to living in different geographic locations.
- Very clear and direct language can be used to tell participants the significance of long-distance mentoring. For mentees indicating they will accept a long-distance mentor, it may be worthwhile to send a follow-up e-mail explaining that their mentor may live in another geographic location from them.
- Ensure participants understand that long-distance is optional and preferences can be communicated when they sign-up or re-commit.

### **Increasing Evaluation Response Rate**

- The response rate for mentors and mentees was substantively higher when Denise sent out a short email asking participants to complete the surveys.
- In the future, it would be useful if Denise can email mentors and mentees so that Survey Monkey data includes email addresses (sending the survey as an email invitation rather than through web link). This is beneficial during data cleaning and matching mentors and mentees who both responded to the survey.

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