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Mountains, Molehills and Milestones: Participant experiences from the WSU Mentoring Programs

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Background

Mentoring has been defined 'as a relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger , less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé's career' (Ragins and Kram 2007, p.5, cited in deVries 2011, p.3). However, there are a range of different definitions used in the research on mentoring which can make comparisons between studies difficult. Mentoring has been found to provide a number of benefits to mentees such as an information source, career guidance, friendship and intellectual guidance (Sands et al 1991) as well as self-worth, workplace effectiveness, job satisfaction (Donnelly & McSweeney 2011). In universities, specific benefits for junior women academics participating in formal mentoring program include promotion and improved research performance (Gardiner et al 2007). Benefits of mentoring also extend to the workplace itself, with benefits such as organisational commitment, retention of staff and loyalty and stability (Donnelly & McSweeney 2011).

While Noe (1988) and Kram (1985) report that women have historically less access to mentoring than men, more recently organisations have focused on increasing access and as a result, women are now more likely to be in a mentoring program (Janice, Smith and Markham 2000). However, while more women are being mentored, they still gain less career benefit from mentoring than do their male counterparts (Ibarra, Carter & Silva 2010). Furthermore, Valian (2005) found that gender schemas were responsible for overrating men and underrating women in professional settings that resulted in men having more advantages than women. Such issues are then compounded by the lack of females available in senior roles to then be mentors to more junior women. Furthermore, this may also extend to LGBTI academics.

Tenenbaum, Crosby & Gliner (2001) found that there were 3 main functions of mentoring: psycho-social, instrumental and networking support while deVries (2011) found the mentoring relationship between a mentor and mentee can be structured in various ways along the mentoring continuum, with 'instrumental' mentoring at one end and 'developmental' mentoring at the other end. Instrumental mentoring is a more traditional form of a mentoring relationship which tends to be more outcomes based and skill specific. Developmental mentoring on the other hand, is more open-ended, and is argued to be more conducive to the development of gender insight which may be more appropriate for female mentees (Zachary 2011). Janice et al (2000) also raise the question of whether women have different developmental and career needs and examine if they receive more career development support or psycho-social support and if this is impacted by the gender of the mentor. The developmental and career needs of LGBTI groups as well as the psycho-social support provided to these groups has yet to be established in the literature. Further, Yim & Waters (2013) found that interpersonal comfort, communication quality and attributional confidence were positively related to both the psycho-social and instrumental functions of mentoring.

Various mentoring methods for female academics have been adopted across a range of studies across a range of disciplines to serve a range of different functions. For example, Varkey et al (2012) report on the positive impact of a facilitated peer mentoring program on

academic skills of women in medicine. In this program, the focus and measurement of success was on manuscript writing with measurements including the number of manuscripts submitted to peer reviewed journals and those in press or published. Stenken & Zajicek (2010) discuss the importance of both formal and informal mentoring for female academics and highlight the role of mentors in navigating the political landscape but also in providing feedback on grant proposals and manuscripts.

Cross-disciplinary research into the experiences of female mentees that acknowledge the obstacles faced during participation in a semi-formal mentoring program as well as the successes is required to provide further insight to the mentoring process for female academics. Further research is required to understand the antecedents in mentoring relationships that lead to success (Yim & Waters 2013), and to provide recommendations for future programs and participants.

The research spans across a number of theories such as cascading gender bias (Warren, 2009), as well as unwritten rules of advancement and the double-bind dilemma as identified by Schulz and Enslin (2014). Mentoring theory (Levinson 1978, Kram 1985) as well as the performance perspective versus political perspective of mentoring (Kirchmeyer 2005) are also considerations in this research.

Research context and hypotheses

The research uses a formal mechanism to evaluate the experiences of both academic and professional university staff participating in university mentoring programs and whether this has been successful or not in assisting staff to progress their career. Further, the research explores the experiences of a diverse range of staff to consider how the university mentoring program caters for both mentees and mentors and if there are any notable differences in the experiences of the mentoring program which may be due to demographic factors such as age, discipline, culture, gender, qualifications or years of experience.

The mentoring program at Western Sydney University operates out of the Talent and Leadership Development team as part of the Office of Human Resources and is fully funded by the University. The mentoring program is offered to both academic staff and professional staff.

Prior to commencing the mentoring program, staff are nominated by their Deans, Directors or Managers to participate in the program. A selection panel matches mentors and mentees based on information provided by staff on an application form, including career goals and aspirations, areas of interest and expertise, and career and professional development needs (Western Sydney University, 2017).

The mentoring program involves a number of steps, including the nomination process and submission of an application, followed by a matching exercise, a number of formal workshops and regular meetings between mentors and mentees. A summary of how the mentoring program is currently structured is provided below in Figure 1.

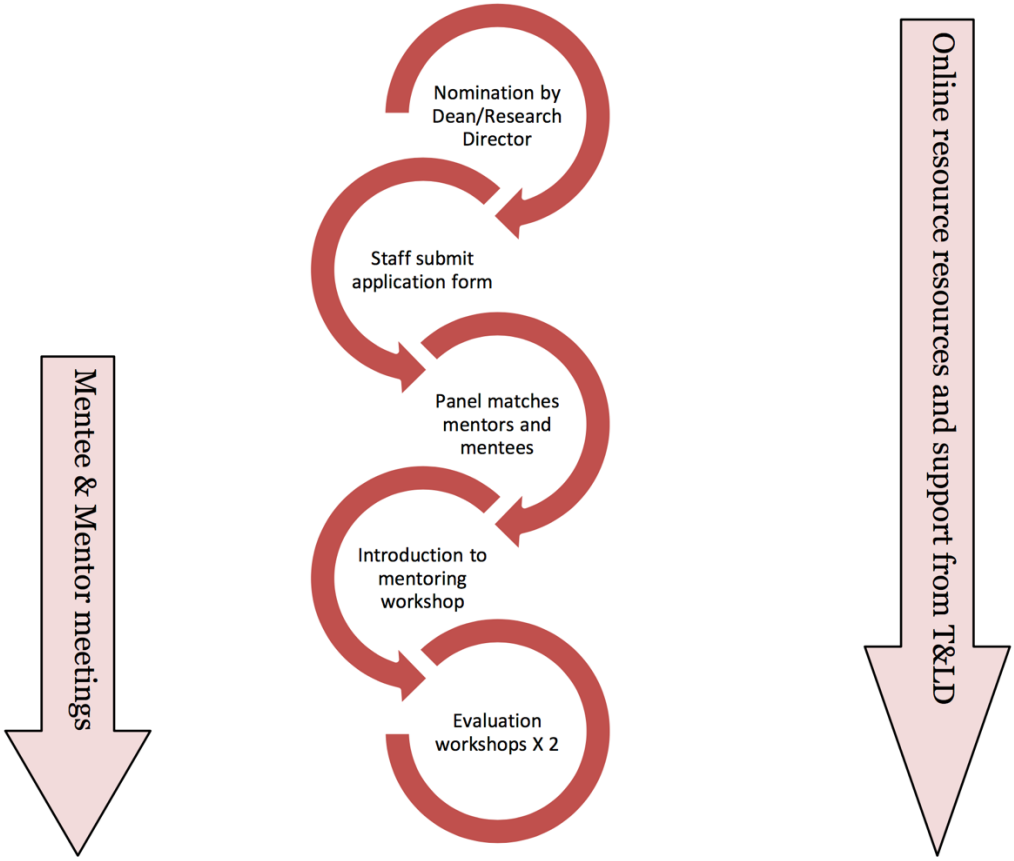

Figure 1: Structure of University Mentoring Program

In order to facilitate gender equality and promote workplace inclusion, this project was targeted at undertaking a review of the mentoring programs offered at WSU and other institutions and in industry to recommend a framework to inform program development for WSU consideration for future mentoring programs.

The project aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What considerations need to be given to the matching of mentees with mentors?
2. What was the main motivation for mentees and mentors to participate in the mentoring program?
3. What were the main goals to be achieved by participants in a mentoring program?
4. What are the outcomes and achievements of participants in the mentoring program?
5. What are some pitfalls to look out for in a mentoring program?
6. What guidance/recommendations do the mentees and mentors have for future participants?
7. How do demographic factors influence the experiences of participants in mentoring programs?

The following section outlines the methods adopted in the study to answer the research questions.

Method

Sample

All participants of the University's mentoring programs in the last 5 years were emailed an invitation from the research team via the University's Talent and Development Team to participate in the research. Participants were given 2 weeks to consider participation before a follow-up email will be sent and another 2 weeks provided to make a final decision on whether to participate or not. Of approximately 204 staff participating in mentoring programs, a total of 68 staff members volunteered to participate in this research study, giving a 33% response rate.

Data Collection

Academic and professional staff participants were asked to write about their experiences in a University Mentoring Program by reflecting and documenting their experiences as a mentee, mentor or both mentee and mentor via responses to an online *Qualtrics* survey. Some of the open-ended responses took the form of a short narrative (story). Participants were asked to reflect on their mentoring goals, the outcomes of the program, any challenges experienced and suggest any recommendations for future participants involved in mentoring programs at universities.

Participants were also asked for some basic demographic information such as age, gender, qualifications, discipline area and years post doctorate. While the total number of participants in the study was 68, only 56 participants fully completed all parts of the study. The data collected was primarily descriptive and qualitative in nature.

Data Analysis

Demographic data was analysed using descriptive statistics to show the age of the participants, gender breakdown, work experience, qualifications, discipline area and career stage.

The qualitative data collected from the open-ended survey responses involves using a 'Paradigmatic Cognition and Analysis of Narratives' approach using both inductive (themes derived from the data) and deductive (compared and contrasted with an established theory) analysis. In this approach the research is a story analyst (Sharp et al., 2018).

The thematic (inductive) analysis was initially conducted manually by adopting various colour markers to identify major themes by highlighting related passages of text to create a pool of codes for each major theme. Codes and illustrative direct quotes from participants were electronically recorded in a coding document with related codes grouped into themes that were continuously reviewed and revised throughout the analysis process prior to compiling the final results.

Deductive coding was completed concurrently with inductive coding and involved exploring the data for examples of theoretical concept according to key mentoring concepts and theories. Categories and themes were directly drawn from the data using methods like constant comparative analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The experiences of the participants were used to extend, support and refute concepts in theories or knowledge about mentoring.

The data analysis process is continuing as data is currently being input into software package *Leximancer* to provide a visual representation of the results and to test for relationships between themes. SPSS will also be used to test for any significant relationships between demographics and major themes to assist in answering the research questions.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the sample identify that the age of participants range from 25 years of age to 74 years of age. The age of respondents across various age groups is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Age of respondents

Age Range	%
18-24	0
25-34	5.56
35-44	31.48
45-54	27.78
55-64	29.63
65-74	5.56
75-84	0
85 or older	0
Total	100

In terms of gender, the sample was over-represented by females being 68.4% compared with 60.6% of university staff being female (WSU, Pocket Profile, 2018). This, however, is representative of the higher proportion of female staff volunteering to participate in the mentoring program, reported by Talent and Leadership Development to be 67.6%. Details of the gender breakdown for participants in the study are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Gender of respondents

Age Range	%
Male	28.07
Female	68.42
Prefer not to say	3.51

Of the participants in the study, 57.14% were academic staff members and 42.86% were professional staff members. This meant that academic staff members were over-represented in the sample with 49.5% of all permanent University are academic staff (WSU, Pocket Profile, 2018).

The sample was comprised of both mentees and mentors with mentors making up 47.37% of the sample, mentees representing 45.61% of the sample and 7.02% of participants having been part of the mentoring program as both a mentor and mentee over the last 5 years. Close to 31% of participants reported being part of the mentoring program in 2018, followed by 20% in 2015 and 14.5% in 2017. These were closely followed by years 2014 and 2016 each with 11% of participants with the balance in 2019, 2013, 2012, 2011 and 2010 respectively.

Participants in the study were asked about the number of years of work experience they had in higher education. The results ranged from less than 5 years to more than 25 years as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Years of work experience in higher education

Number of Years	%
Less than 5	10.91
5-10 years	23.64
11-15 years	23.64
16-20 years	21.82
21-25 years	7.27
More than 25 years	12.73
Total	100

The sample was spread across a wide range of discipline areas with a higher number of academic staff from the health sciences and humanities. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of staff by discipline area. Notably, there were no participants from construction or engineering disciplines. Although there were also none for accounting or economics and finance, it is possible that these were reported under the broader discipline area of ‘business’. Those who reported ‘other’ were mainly from the library but also included student support services, research services and the disciplines of ‘law’ (2 respondents) or ‘medicine’ (1 respondent).

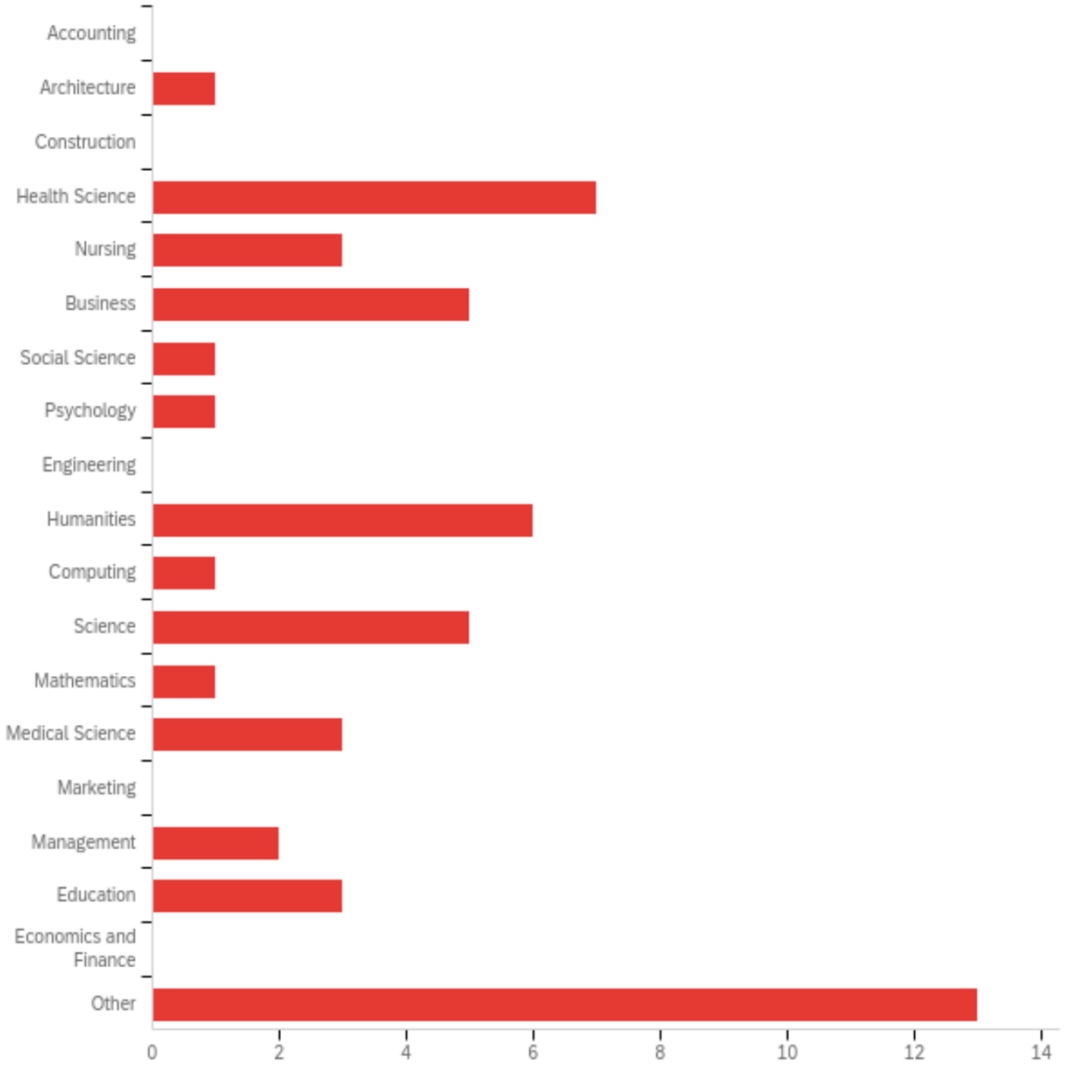

Figure 2: Discipline breakdown of respondents

For academic staff participants, 84% held a PhD and the average number of years since PhD conferral for mentees was 6 years although three mentees had received their PhD in the 12 months prior to joining the mentoring program. For academic mentors, the average number of years since PhD conferral was 15 years with one conferred as long as 31 years ago.

Matching of Mentors and Mentees

The process of matching mentors and mentees is critical to the success of the mentoring program. Many participants commented on how well this was done and over 70% of participants (both mentors and mentees) were 'extremely satisfied' with the matching as shown in Table 4. Only 3 participants (5%) were not satisfied with the match.

Table 4: Satisfaction of mentee/mentor matching

Level of satisfaction	%	N
Extremely satisfied	70.18	40
Moderately satisfied	17.54	10
Slightly satisfied	3.51	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3.51	2
Slightly dissatisfied	1.75	1
Moderately dissatisfied	0	0
Extremely dissatisfied	3.51	2

Participants were asked to provide the main reason why they were satisfied with their mentee/mentor match. The top 5 reasons provided were:

1. Similar interests;
2. Compatible personalities;
3. Ambition and motivation;
4. Same stage of life;
5. Well matched in terms of mentee's needs and mentor's capabilities;
6. Mentor could relate to barriers faced by mentee.

The small number of participants who were dissatisfied with the matching process felt that their mentor did not have the appropriate skills to mentor them or were too busy to be effectively engaged. One mentee also felt that their mentor was too senior for them.

Motivation of participants to be part of the mentoring program

The primary motivation for mentees to join the university mentoring program was career development and promotion as well as guidance, support and advice. This was closely followed by wanting an interdisciplinary conversation. Other motivations included assistance with research, managing students, networking, learning and capacity-building, visibility for their work, time management and inspiration. Some sample comments regarding motivation to be part of the mentoring program follow:

To advance my career, I felt that I needed support and an outside perspective on my work, achievements and goals. While my line supervisors have been supportive overall, I felt that their advice to me was driven by their own agendas, which limited my opportunities to work on a higher aim.

> *I had just finished my PhD and failed to receive support for a promotion application. I had a strong record in administration and governance but my research record need improving.*

After finishing the PhD I was ready for new challenges and to focus on my career but I really needed some guidance.

> *I felt I had hit a low-point in my career and work-life balance and was seeking direction and inspiration.*

Closely aligned with the mentee motivation was the motivation of mentors which was identified as providing service to others in helping them achieve their career goals. For example:

> *I wanted to inspire someone else to achieve and work towards their goals and values within their academic career.*

Other motivations of mentors included empowering women, sharing knowledge, self-development, empathy, expectations of peers, giving back (as was mentored themselves in the past), to improve WSU's reputation and to inspire others. Some mentors expressed their motivation as follows:

> *I am at heart an educator and enabler, and mentoring is one vehicle for doing this. I have a very large amount of corporate knowledge from the University and wider sector, and I want to pass this on - indeed, it is an expectation of my current position. More generally, professors are expected to provide leadership and contribute to the culture and development of the University; again, mentoring is an opportunity for doing this. It is frustrating to see younger colleagues who appear to be overwhelmed by work, with little career direction and inadequate support from our formal systems. Mentoring could help them although, in practice, my mentees have all had clear goals and directions, and saw mentoring as a way of supporting these.*

> *I am particularly interested in mentoring women who have children to negotiate academic roles and gain ongoing employment in both research and teaching.*

Goals and hopes for the mentoring program

Participants were asked about their goals (and hopes) they had for the mentoring program. Responses from the mentors identified 9 main themes as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5: Mentor goals for the mentoring program

Goals of the mentor
1. Support women
2. Share knowledge
3. Improve morale
4. Help mentees
5. Show leadership
6. Facilitate development
7. Program expansion
8. Learn to inspire
9. See positive results

There were also 9 themes identified by the mentees in their responses about their hopes and goals for the mentoring program as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Mentor goals for the mentoring program

Goals of the mentee
1. Secure grant funding
2. Build networks
3. Develop management style/leadership
4. HDR supervision
5. Career progression & promotion
6. Publish research
7. Manage workload/competing priorities
8. Improve teaching
9. Knowing if I am on the right track

Outcomes and achievements of participants in the mentoring program

There were a wide range of outcomes and achievements of participants in the mentoring program for both the mentors and mentees. While the mentor participants shared in the successes of their mentees, the mentors also relayed that they felt they played a significant role in assisting the mentees obtain these achievements. Further, the mentors took great delight in building lasting friendships with their mentees and also found that being a mentor allowed them to revisit their own career and make improvements where necessary. Tangible achievements included developing career plans, reviewing of grants, applications for promotion and awards, and advice on the preparation of scientific papers. Some mentors also invited their mentees to so-supervise research students with them and to work with them on research grants and projects. Less tangible achievements included

developing confidence by providing a sounding board for ideas and contributing to succession planning for the University.
The outcomes and achievements of mentee participants demonstrate the very tangible short term and long terms benefits that have resulted from the mentoring program for staff and for the university. These are identified in Table 7.

Table 7: Tangible outcomes and achievements of mentees participating in the university mentoring program

Goals of the mentee	Description
Research	Secure seed grant funding Prepare Discoverer Early Career Research Grant application ARC Grant Application Research Awards External research grants Internal funding Increased quality and quantity of publications HDR students Joint supervision of research projects
Teaching and Learning	Fellowship of the UK Higher Education Academy (Advance HE) Student Feedback
International	International connections Visits to overseas laboratories
Professional	Successful promotion ADP Leave Visibility with the executive Future planning/goal setting

While many of the tangible outcomes were closely aligned to the original goals of mentee participants, a number of intangible outcomes were also identified by mentee participants, with the most common intangible benefit identified as ‘confidence’. Confidence was expressed in a number of different ways, whether it be confidence in their own work, confidence in trusting their instinct, confident in dealing with supervisors or confidence to manage difficult relationships or inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. The following comments describe this increase in confidence.

But I also gained more confidence in trusting my own instincts in terms of making choices and learned that saying no sometimes is ok. I had the confidence to apply for (and achieve) ADP and gained my Deans support without compromise.

More confidence to engage in critical conversations in the work place (candid but respectful conversations).

More confidence to manage challenging workplace relationships.

The main achievement I see was an increasing confidence in my own work.

Other less tangible benefits include having clearly identified goals, dealing with anxiety and disappointment, task selection, meeting deadlines, dealing with peers and senior staff and work/life balance. These benefits are largely related to wellbeing and it is important to note the value of the mentoring program in this regard. While these benefits are more difficult to quantify, they also have a direct relationship on employee health and productivity. Some examples of comments follow.

I have a clearer focus on what I need to achieve; I have a better understanding on the steps I need to take and I've put in place 'actions' that should help me achieve my goals. I have not completed these 'actions' yet so the achievements are not really 'tangible' yet but the intangible achievement is a more focused and less stressed approach to my career progression.

I am being more selective in the tasks that I take on to make sure that they are beneficial to me as well as to the university.

Meaningful and significant change with regard to work-life balance (process for leaving work each day on time; establishing boundaries; purposefully engaging in a fun activity every day).

Given we were at the time, going through the professional staff shared services restructure, I felt this helped me regain some confidence in myself and that I would be able to manage myself well through this process of change and look forward to a better future.

I have a better perspective on what is truly important in life and am re-discovering the joy of my work. Prior to the mentoring program, I was close to burnout and feeling disillusioned with my career. My well-being was suffering significantly and I did not see my future in my role as being sustainable.

While a number of tangible and intangible outcomes and achievements of the mentoring program were identified by participants, the mentoring program also makes a substantial contribution to the developmental, career and psycho-social needs. These are discussed in the next section.

Contribution to developmental, career and psycho-social needs

For mentor participants, the mentoring program provided a way for them to 'give back' and to help promote positive culture. Mentors enjoyed the social aspect of mentoring and learning about others but also assisted in contributing to their own needs. For example, developmental needs were improved as mentors improved their listening skills, problem solving, reflective practice, critical thinking and communicating skills. In terms of career needs, mentors felt that mentoring would be viewed in a positive light by recruitment managers in the future. Mentoring also provided mentors with a strong sense of self-worth and assisted some in building their own confidence and self-esteem.

The mentee participants found the mentoring program provided support system to them that enabled them to develop their assertiveness, confidence and self-awareness. Further, many academic mentees highlighted the struggle of balancing their workload with expectations of their supervisors and found their mentors to play a supportive role in that they allowed the mentees to talk through these issues in an open but safe environment, while also providing some helpful advice in a non-competitive and non-threatening way. Mentees provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about their mentors and of the mentoring program. Mentees felt that their mentors assisted with their mental health as well as with their career. The following comments assist in understanding the valuable contributions of the mentoring program on developmental, career and psycho-social needs:

> *I've been struggling a bit under the 'weight' of academia this year in terms of workload and expectations. I think having a mentor was helpful to talk through some of these concerns and help me to see what I could do to address these. It also helped me to try to come to terms with times when you experience rejection and when your work just isn't good enough. You can't let this get you down. You just have to keep going.*
>
> *The mentoring program really made a huge difference to my career at Western. My mentor passed on knowledge and importantly built my confidence. Also knowing that a member of the professoriate at Western "has my back" is really priceless*.
>
> *It gave me confidence on what I'm doing and achieving. I think this point alone unlocked all of my other achievements during the year.*
>
> *The program helped me to develop my confidence and appropriate assertiveness so I was able to stand up for myself.*
>
> *I was regularly stressed before our meeting (due to teaching or other issues) and always came out of our meeting with greater focus, calmness and determination.*
>
> *The mentoring program has helped me develop my confidence and made me more self- aware of my own strengths and weaknesses both personally and in my career progress.*

Having a mentor outside the discipline was SOOOO helpful as at the time there were some difficult challenges that I had to overcome and it was beneficial to have someone who I could talk to about this and who understood but was not too close to the situation. We were able to talk through some strategies that I could use and what the potential consequences for each option would be.

It was just good having someone to talk to who understood and who I didn't feel I was competing with and who i could trust to give me the honest truth. The mentor really helped me not just with my career but with my mental health also.

As a new parent, it was also encouraging to hear my mentor emphasise that I do need to prioritise my family at this time while making sure my career advances.

I have gained so many things which are difficult to put into words, but I am definitely more confident in making career choices, and taking opportunities to develop my knowledge and skills in ways that I see fitting my role and goals.

My psycho-social well-being was at such a low point prior to commencing the mentoring program that any career aspirations were really not on the radar. By addressing work-life balance and restoring well-being, I was able to then re-focus on professional development and developing leadership capabilities.

Pitfalls to look out for in a mentoring program

While participants were overwhelmingly positive about their mentoring experience in the university mentoring program, they were asked to identify any obstacles or pitfalls to look out for in future mentoring programs. The types of issues identified included:

- → different campuses;
- → inadequate (or no) time allocation provided by supervisor to participate in program;
- → limited time available due to conflicting commitments (e.g. teaching);
- → meeting in an environment too closely tied to the normal work space;
- → unrealistic goals or expectations;
- → mentor/mentee leaving the university;
- → lack of goals or commitment from either mentee or mentor;
- → not utilizing resources provided e.g. the mentee's toolkit;
- → failure to schedule meetings ahead of time and/or record notes from meetings;
- → breaches of confidentiality by either party.

Guidance/recommendations for future participants

Participants were asked to provide suggestions about how they felt the mentoring program could be made more accessible and inclusive for staff from all gender groups and demographic backgrounds.

A number of mentor participants stated that they thought the program was already inclusive and accessible and did not have any suggestions in this area. Some comments from these participants are as follows:

> *All three of my mentees were women (I am a man) and came from a range of cultural backgrounds. From this perspective, I think the mentoring program is inclusive.*
>
> *I think that it is inclusive already.*

Suggestions that were provided by mentor participants revealed 8 main themes:

1. provide a gender option;
2. pair parents together;
3. invite targeted demographics (i.e. those lacking time or confidence);
4. help 'lost' employees just those already on track;
5. make the mentoring program common practice;
6. work across professional and academic boundaries;
7. promotion of the mentoring program from senior administration;
8. testimonials to promote the program.

Comments from mentor participants which support these themes are as follows.

> *I suggest asking women whether they would like to be mentored by another woman or man or whether they don't mind and whether they are parents and whether they would benefit from having a mentor who is parent/mother.*
>
> *There may be some individuals or groups who are less likely to volunteer for a mentoring scheme because they lack time or confidence, or are overloaded. Perhaps the university could actively reach out (via Deans, Managers or DAPS) to invite some individuals in targeted demographics.*
>
> *Make it more of a routine thing for everyone beyond PhD to have a mentor; and to work across professional/academic when possible.*
>
> *The program needs to be promoted by senior administration (Deans etc.) within each school and by staff from the Office of Human Resources at school meetings or other occasions.*
>
> *Current and previous mentees and mentors could also be asked to promote the program to likely participants.*

> *I think this program needs to be better publicised in the university as I am on a Professorial Leadership Group and Senior Executive did not know about this program, so now they do.*

Many of the mentee participants also believed that the program was very much already inclusive and did not provide any suggestions for improvement. For example:

> *I didn't find any issues here so I'm not sure how this could be improved.*

While the program was seen to be inclusive and accessible, one mentee raised the issue of staff confidence being a possible barrier to joining the program, for example:

> *I think the program is fairly inclusive and accessible to all staff but some staff may be more introverted and shy and less likely to put their hands up to be involved even though it would really benefit them and they may be fearful of who the mentor might be.*

However, with regards to accessibility, some mentees raised the issue of having more mentees in the program than mentors, for example:

> *In 2019, the demand from mentees exceeded the supply of mentors. I understand this meant that not all mentees who applied were able to participate. Apart from the logistical considerations of supply-demand, the program is accessible and inclusive.*

There were an additional 5 major themes from the mentees comments, with the first four of these aligning with the themes raised by the mentors:

1. provide a gender option;
2. pair parents together;
3. invite targeted demographics (i.e. those lacking time or confidence);
4. help 'lost' employees just those already on track;
5. travel for formal training
6. approval process for program

The following comments from mentees are indicative of these themes:

> *Some staff may not be aware of the program or how they can benefit of it. If there are groups that, based on existing data, underperform or tend not to progress as expected in their careers, there should have channels where they are contacted directly and offered access to mentorship programs, even before any problem manifests or they feel the need for it.*

> *Both my mentor and I were from demographically similar backgrounds which might have helped as we just 'got' each other and didn't have to spend anytime interpreting different signals or cultures.*

The mentoring program had the more formal aspect of the program delivered at Frogmore House. While this training was an important aspect of the program, it may limit some people from being involved in the program due to the travel involved. This may also be the case where mentors and mentees are located on different campuses.

Maybe there could be spinoff mentoring programs that are specifically targeted at particular demographics to specifically assist in addressing issues that these cohorts might face. e.g. gender, culture, parent or campus based.

Participants were also asked what they would look for in a future mentoring relationship or do differently next time. Mentees said that they would look for someone who would have similar interests and someone they could connect with on a personal level. Also important to mentees was to ensure that regular meetings occurred even if this meant using Zoom or Skype if face-to-face meetings were not possible at times. Mentees also said that they would have more meetings and ensure meetings took place in a neutral setting. Further, it was suggested that a more structured approach to meetings would be helpful, including specific action items. One mentee stated that they "would want a female mentor on same campus".

Mentor participants really want mentees who understand their capability and who are motivated to change / improve. Mentors also suggested that they would have more structure to their meetings, prepare specific items for the meeting ahead of time and also keep records of meetings. In addition, mentors said that they would listen more attentively. One mentor also suggested that for future mentoring, with the mentee's permission, they might get some thoughts from their line manager to obtain insights into the environment that the mentee is working in.

Other considerations for the future included having more transparency over the matching process and possibly more specific matching. It was also suggested that a speed mentoring session be provide at the end of the program to allow all mentees and mentors to take turns.

There were 5 main themes in the responses from mentees to the question "What would you say to a new mentee starting the mentoring program?". These themes were:

1. keep an open mind and be open to change;
2. prepare for each meeting by setting an agenda, sending meeting invites, keeping and sending records of meetings and end each meeting with a goal to achieve before the next meeting;
3. ask lots of questions;
4. be willing to take risks and to go beyond your comfort zone;
5. have clear goals and be specific with your mentor about what you want to achieve.

The mentors were also asked about what they would say to a new mentor starting the mentoring program. Listening to your mentee was the most popular response, closely followed by allocating time to your mentee. Other advice included staying committed and genuinely interested as well as agreeing on expectations right at the beginning and keeping records of meetings to make the mentee accountable.

Limitations

The limitations of the study included the small size of the sample which makes it impossible to generalize the results across the broader population. Other limitations include self-reporting by study participants which may have introduced bias.

Collaboration and research output

This research study has allowed for interdisciplinary collaboration between three early career researchers, who themselves met through the academic mentoring program a number of years ago. Through this collaboration, researchers have shared various literature sources, research methods and research software that have allowed an ongoing dialogue around the role of mentoring programs in ensuring all staff have equal opportunities to access appropriate career support and guidance to assist with career progression.

While an academic journal article has not yet been published, the authors have been working on a draft submission to *Human Relations*, a journal with the following rankings:

- → The Financial Times Top 50 journals list
- → A* in the Australian Business Deans Council Journal Quality List
- → 4 in the CABS Academic Journal Guide
- → 2-year impact factor of 3.367
- → 5-year impact factor of 4.36

The research team would also be willing to present their findings at a relevant university careers, gender equity or mentoring event.

Discussion and Conclusion

While the university mentoring program has been proven to be successful and inclusive, there were still some participants who suggested that a gender and /or demographic specific focus be incorporated into the program. Previous studies, such as that by Schulz & Enslin (2014) found that women in particular required access to mentors due to the 'unwritten rules of advancement' and that finding mentors to support them as they look to

advance their career was critical. Further, studies by Bailey et al (2016) found that females more than males looked for mentors who were goal-oriented and were also significantly more likely than their male counterparts to rate 'integrity' as a quality they would look for in a mentor. All participants in these studies, regardless of gender or race, emphasized friendliness and interpersonal qualities as important in a mentor. This seems to have been supported with the results from the current study. Results from the current study also support those from Kao et al (2014) which showed a stronger link between psychosocial benefits of mentoring for same-gender mentor relationships than for cross-gender mentor relationships.

Evidence reported in the results section about the University mentoring program at Western Sydney University show that the program has been successful in assisting mentees with their career progression and being promoted. This was also the case at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations where their mentoring program boosted minority representation at the management level by 9% to 24% with minorities and women participating in mentoring programs being more likely to be promoted and retained in the University (Beheshti, 2019).

Mentoring has also been found to be successful in the corporate world, with mentoring programs that combine the formal part of mentoring with the informal. For example, Deloitte's Emerging Leaders Development Program (ELDP) is a multidisciplinary professional development program that uses a combination of formal skill-building sessions, self-assessments and 360-degree feedback in addition to "a partner, principal, or managing director mentor who commits to at least two years to help their protégées drive their own careers" (Deloitte, 2020, np). Further, Forbes magazine (Beheshti, 2019) found that mentees who participated in the mentoring program at Sun Microsystems were promoted five times more than non-participants and mentors made even more progress, being six times more likely to be promoted. In addition, retention rates were significantly higher for those who participated - mentees (72%) and mentors (69%) - than for employees who did not participate (49%). At Zynga, mentoring has become an integral part of their on-boarding and development process, with reverse mentoring also adopted for new graduates to challenge mentors with new ideas and perspectives (Mentorloop, 2020).

While there are a number of mentoring programs available both in universities and in the business world, the way these mentoring programs are structured varies. However, what has been proven consistently is how successful these programs have been in assisting employees with their career progression and retention. The findings of this study are important for all staff considering inclusive mentoring programs to assist in advancing their career and to higher education institutions who seek to offer successful inclusive mentoring programs for their staff. The recommendations section of this report highlights improvements for future programs and participants to ensure that the programs are contributing to the developmental, career and psycho-social needs of staff from all gender groups and to provide equal opportunity for all staff to advance careers through promotion and improved performance.