Students’ Perceptions of Mentoring in a Pharmacy Program
Gayatri Gopal, Clive Mendonca, Kyle D. Null
The University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy Department of Pharmacy Administration

Purpose
- To understand professional pharmacy students’ perceptions and attitudes of mentoring at The University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy.

Background
- Two major mentoring functions emerged from literature: career-related and psychosocial.
- Career-related functions include activities such as providing guidance, challenging tasks, etc., directly relating to the protégé’s career advancement.
- Psychosocial functions include activities influencing the protégé’s self-image and competence.
- A mentor can therefore be broadly defined as an individual who assists another on an academic, career, or personal level.
- Pharmacy students having participated in faculty mentoring have reported it to be of value and importance and express satisfaction with the functions provided by this interaction.
- There exists a need to examine specific mentor characteristics in professional pharmacy programs.

Methods

DESIGN
- A cross-sectional survey research design was used.

SAMPLE
- A convenience sample of students classified as second-year (P2), third-year (P3) or fourth-year (P4) professional pharmacy students based on their current position in the pharmacy program, who voluntarily decide to participate at the time of administering the survey was utilized.

DATA COLLECTION
- A self-administered, in-class survey during two separate class periods was used.
- The Institutional Review Board at The University of Mississippi approved the study.

ANALYSIS
- Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, and mode were calculated for demographic information gathered from the study.
- Tests were used to determine group differences on variables of interest.
- A chi-square statistic was utilized to determine students’ preferred year for mentoring.
- Pearson bivariate correlations were calculated to examine relationships between perceived value and perceived need of a mentoring relationship.

“...mentoring is a form of professional socialization whereby a more experienced (usually older) individual acts as a guide, role model, teacher and patron of a less experienced (often younger) protégé. The aim of this relationship is to further development and refinement of the protégé’s skills, abilities, and understanding.”

Results
- The participation rate was 85.5% (n = 147). As is the trend with pharmacy schools nationally, the respondents were primarily female (64.1%) and had a self-reported mean grade point average of 3.64.

Research Objective 1
To identify specific mentor characteristics sought by the student
- Most frequently reported attributes that students would prefer a mentor possess are experience (n=110), supportiveness (n=109), communication skills (n=60) and integrity (n=56).

Research Objective 2
To identify whether students prefer for a male or female mentor vary by their gender
- A greater number of students agreed that they would prefer to be assigned to a female mentor (mean = 4.24) versus a male mentor (mean = 3.39). The differences were significant at p=0.05.

Research Objective 3
To evaluate the students’ perceived need for a mentoring relationship
- Females perceived greater need (mean = 4.87) for a mentoring relationship compared to males (mean = 4.08). The differences were significant at p=0.05. (Scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = not at all needed and 7 = highly needed).

Research Objective 4
To identify what type of meeting the student prefer (group/individual)
- A greater number of students agreed that they would prefer to meet with their mentor individually (mean = 5.37) rather than as a group (mean = 5.54). The differences were significant at p<0.05. (Scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

Research Objective 5
To identify when in their professional development, students perceive they require mentoring
- Students reported a difference in preference for year of mentoring relationship development based on their current year in the pharmacy program (p=0.001).

- The majority of pharmacy students preferred developing a mentoring relationship during the P3 year (62.1%).
- P2 students indicated that they would prefer to develop a mentoring relationship during their P2 year (12.4%) rather than the P3 year (48.6%).
- On the contrary, P4 students indicated a greater desire to develop a mentoring relationship during their P3 year (23.4%) than their P2 year (3.4%).

Research Objective 6
To identify which type of mentoring relationship the students prefer (formal/informal)
- Students’ preference for self-selecting (informal relationship) a mentor (mean = 4.93) was greater than their preference for being assigned to (formal relationship) a mentor (mean = 3.68). The differences were significant at p=0.05 (Scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

Research Objective 7
To assess the students’ perceived benefit of a mentoring relationship and its correlation with their perceived need
- Female students perceived greater value (mean=5.54) in a mentoring relationship compared to males (mean=4.85). The differences were significant at p=0.05 (Scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = not at all beneficial and 7 = extremely beneficial).
- A positive relationship was found to exist between students’ perceived value and need for a mentoring relationship (r = 0.549, p=0.001).

Research Objective 8
To assess the relationship between students cumulative GPA and their perceived need for a mentoring relationship
- Students’ cumulative GPA and their perceived need to develop a mentoring relationship were found to be generally unrelated (r = -0.036, p>0.05).

Research Objective 9
To determine the mentoring functions pharmacy students desire
- Even though students indicated a strong desire for all the mentoring outcomes, career (mean = 5.89) and academic development (mean = 5.82) were rated the highest among all the outcomes desired from a mentoring relationship. (Scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

Implications
- By recognizing students’ reported need for and desired characteristics of a mentoring relationship, academic administrators can structure and initiate a pharmacy mentoring program that benefits students’ academic and career development.

Limitations
- The responses of some students may have been influenced by their previous or current mentoring relationship, if any.
- The questionnaire was not pre-tested.
- There may be difference in the responses between the two classes which were administered the survey at different times of the day. This could be due to fatigue developed at the end of the day.
- The findings are limited to professional pharmacy students at the University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy.

References