

Final Report 2022-2023 Assessment Inquiry Grant
Peer Mentoring for University Honors
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Introduction:

The University Honors program at CSU Fullerton was established in 1983 and is dedicated to inclusive excellence and extending the frontier of knowledge beyond the boundaries of the University. It hosts a community of scholars from across the campus who share a love of learning. The Program's mission is dedicated to inclusive excellence and the exploration of interdisciplinary and global perspectives amongst faculty and students within the Titan community who share a love of learning and engagement. The values of the program include 1) to foster intellectual curiosity and promote a commitment to inclusion among highly motivated, socially aware, and academically engaged students; 2) to create global citizens who engage with their local and global communities with the belief that we can all make a difference; 3) to provide an interdisciplinary curricular experience that allows students to critically evaluate complex social issues; and 4) to embody CSUF's Guiding Principles of Social Justice within our mission, vision, and programming.

The four-year pathway curriculum is a 24-unit undergraduate interdisciplinary academic program with seminars that meet general education program requirements. In addition to completing 15 units of GE coursework, students complete four colloquium courses designed to prepare them for their interdisciplinary senior honors project in their final year. As part of the honors community, students received enhanced advising, specialized co-curricular programming, and are part of a shared learning community. Honors courses offer small seminar-style class sizes and interdisciplinary approaches to their general education experience. Students also have opportunities to take part in Honors-specific study abroad programs. The culminating requirement for students is the completion and presentation of their senior honors project, which is an interdisciplinary research or creative project that they work on in conjunction with a faculty mentor.

The HONR 100 course: Introduction to University Honors is a one-unit course that students complete during their first year. The goals of this course are to introduce students to the university honors program and its requirements, and foster an understanding the role of identity, culture, power, and privilege in society, and how these factors impact local communities. During their second year, students enroll in their 2nd colloquium course, HONR 200: Being Scholarly and Creative in an Interdisciplinary World. In this course, students begin to explore the nature of interdisciplinary inquiry in the context of the Senior Honors project and begin to identify scholarly activity related to their major, personal interests, and professional ambitions.

During the Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 semesters, the University Honors program embedded a peer mentor component into the 100 and 200 course. Students in the HONR 200 course were assigned 1-2 mentees from the HONR 100 level course. The role of the HONR 200 mentors was to serve as a knowledgeable point of contact for campus resources and peer-level advice. It also allowed the HONR 200 students to experiment with leadership styles, and interpersonal and communication skills. Throughout the semester, the HONR 200 students met with their students two times during the semester. Mentors were also provided with lectures designed to educate them about campus resources and effective mentoring skills.

Results:

Surveys were administered to students in HONR 100 during the first two weeks of the semester and during the last two weeks of the semester. As part of these surveys, students were asked four questions to assess their sense of belonging:

- I am an active part of the university community.
- I feel connected to CSUF.
- I have at least one person who I can turn to for emotional support at CSUF.
- I have at least one person who I can turn to for academic support at CSUF.

Students were presented each of these questions and were asked to rate their experiences on a 5-point likert scale. Table 1 demonstrates the findings for these questions from the pretest and post-test for responses of “strongly agree” and “agree”. Each of these measures showed an improvement at the end of the semester, compared to the start of the semester.

Table 1: Sense of belonging amongst students in Honors

	Fall 22 Pre %	Fall 22 Post %	Difference Fall 22 %	Spring 23 Pre %	Spring 23 Post %	Difference Spring 23%	Average Change AY 22-23 %
Active Part of University Community	32.88	50	17.12	38.15	62	23.85	20.485
Feel Connected to CSUF	47.95	58.33	10.38	51.32	60	8.68	9.53
Emotional Support on Campus	61.65	76.66	15.01	64.47	60	-4.47	5.27
Academic Support on Campus	64.39	81.67	17.28	73.68	88	14.32	15.8

In addition, the post-test included additional questions to measure their sense of belonging within honors and the role of their peer mentor in this experience. Student responses were measured on a yes/no scale.

- This semester, I made new friends with classmates from Honors.
- This semester, my support network expanded as a result of getting to know my classmates from Honors.
- I used a campus resource during this semester because my peer mentor suggested it.
- I joined a student club, or participated in at least one on campus activity this semester because my peer mentor suggested it.
- Getting to know my peer mentor improved my transition to CSUF.

Table 2: Impact of Honors and Peer Mentors

	Fall 22 Post	Spring 23 Post	Average AY 22-23
This semester, I made new friends with classmates from Honors	71.67	75	73.335
This semester, my support network expanded as a result of getting to know my classmates from Honors	55	54.17	54.585
Used a campus resource suggested by Peer Mentor	35.59	33.33	34.46
Joined a club or attended a campus activity suggested by Peer Mentor	35.59	20.83	28.21
My Peer Mentor improved transition to CSUF	74.58	66.67	70.625

Almost three-quarters of students noted that they had made friends with their Honors classmates and that their peer mentor had improved their transition to CSUF. Over half of the students stated that their support network had expanded as a result of getting to know their Honors classmates. Peer mentors also positively impacted campus resource use and club/activity engagement of students in HONR 100.

In addition to the surveys, the program hosted meetings with the faculty of the colloquiums to review faculty experiences with teaching these classes. These discussions were held during Summer and Fall 2023. The information from these gatherings is incorporated into the discussion below.

Discussion

Based on the survey data, it appears that the peer mentor program is having a positive impact on the sense of belonging and connection to CSUF and to the Honors program. However, there are several additional areas to explore as we continue to reflect on the impact of this program:

- 1) Currently, the peer mentors only meet with their mentees two times throughout the semester. This limits the opportunities for engagement and connection. Given the other learning goals for HONR 100 and HONR 200, the program needs to consider whether to continue to have peer mentors embedded in both classes. In addition, some students in HONR 200 have expressed that mentoring was not a key interest for them. One option would be to create a course on leadership and mentoring that a smaller group of

students would serve as mentors for HONR 100. This would mean that the mentors would have a larger population of mentees to serve.

- 2) One of the challenges is the matching of mentors to their mentees. While the program has historically tried to match mentees and mentors within the same major or college, this is not always possible given who enrolls in the class. In addition, some sections of 100 and 200 are scheduled in the same time block, while others are scheduled in different times. While class time can be used for mentor/mentee meetings who are scheduled in the same time block, it can be difficult for students to find time to meet with each other outside of class. The program may want to consider either aligning all class times, or creating a separate lab time that all students register in for mentor/mentee activities.
- 3) Mentoring programs are most successful when both the mentor and mentee are invested in the experience. The program should explore whether there are alternative assignments that could be used for students for whom a mentoring program would not be a good fit.
- 4) In Fall 2023, the first group of Upper Division pathway students were admitted to the program. These students are primarily transfer students who did not participate in an Honors program at their community college. In most cases, this means that students who are juniors, but new transfer students, are assigned a mentor who is a 2nd year, but attended CSUF in the prior year. The program should assess whether this is the best fit for these students.