

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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The Graduate School

Morehead State University

April 10, 2020

INITIAL FINDINGS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PEER MENTORING
PROGRAM (PMP) FOR FRESHMAN STUDENT-ATHLETES

Abstract of Capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
at Morehead State University

By

Angela D. Meyer

Hudson, Florida

Committee Chair: Daryl R. Privott, Associate Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

April 10, 2020

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INITIAL FINDINGS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PEER MENTORING
PROGRAM (PMP) FOR FRESHMAN STUDENT-ATHLETES

This is a presentation of findings following the implementation of a peer mentoring program (PMP) for freshman student-athletes at Morehead State University (MSU). This PMP was established within the football team. The intention of the peer mentoring aspect of the overall mentoring program is to increase the socialization, and thereby retention, of freshman student-athletes by providing opportunities for semi-structured small group social interactions led by peer mentors. Peer mentors are upper-class volunteers from the same sport as the freshmen. Participation by peer mentors is an opportunity for leadership development and community service. The following questions are posed: Does participation in the PMP increase social interactions; that is, contacts with other persons? Does participation in the PMP increase feelings of connectedness? Is the PMP perceived as an effective socialization resource?

KEYWORDS: freshman student-athletes, retention, peer mentoring, socialization, leadership development

Candidate Signature

Date

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my capstone to my parents, Donnie and Rosie Justice. This signifies the completion of a long journey. My daddy always wanted me to be a lawyer and become a judge or get my doctorate. Well, here's the doctorate! Momma and Daddy, you are the best. I love you more than I can say. In addition to encouraging me to always reach for more, I know that you always have my back. What a support system!

I would also like to note that family and friends from throughout my life have always encouraged me to continue my education. You have all provided support and encouragement and placed high expectations which I have tried to meet.

I thank God for the opportunities given me and the abilities to meet the challenges presented to me. I know He is always with me and provides for my true needs, not just my wants and desires.

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I want to begin by acknowledging my committee chair, Dr. Daryl R. Privott. When I first interviewed for the graduate program we connected and it has never been broken. You are great at leading, supporting, encouraging, and entertaining. I am very grateful for your laid-back personality and the fact that you like the way I write.

Dr. Shane Shope – thanks so much for your interesting insights and encouragement. I really enjoyed your class on Educational Change. We couldn't even imagine the changes we have now seen.

Sara Larson – What can I say? Thanks for hiring me. You are the one who brought me to Morehead State University and introduced me to working within the Athletics Department. I appreciate you and your friendship more than you know. Now, finish your own dissertation!!

Thanks to the Morehead State University Graduate School and, especially, all of the staff and professors involved in the Education courses.

I couldn't have implemented the peer mentoring program without the football team. Coach Tenyer, thanks for the support. All the assistant coaches whom I antagonized for information, it was appreciated. My Peer Mentors and my 2019 Freshmen, I enjoyed you all. I hope you enjoyed the program, too.

Thanks to all the other coaches and student-athletes who contributed to the data. I hope we will get this program in other sports soon.

My co-workers – Drew, Dallas, Delaina and Raine – thanks! I couldn't have done this without your input and assistance.

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ABBREVIATIONS/DEFINITIONS

Anticipation Survey: Brief (8 statement) survey administered to Participants and Non-Participants during the first week of classes. See Appendix A.

Cohort effect: common characteristics displayed by a group who are linked by shared experience within a designated time frame.

Comfort, Connection, and Opinion Survey: a.k.a. Connections Survey. Administered to Participants and Non-Participants at midterm and finals. First two questions address comfort levels regarding discussion of academic and personal issues. Third question addresses connections with various persons and groups. Fourth, fifth, and sixth questions address comfort levels regarding discussion of issues with various persons. Final question allows respondent to choose their own mentor. See Appendix B.

Connections: relationships established and maintained through social interactions.

EAGLE Center: Eagle Athletic Guided Learning Enhancement Center.

Non-Participants: freshman student-athletes from the sports of Baseball, Men's Cross Country, Softball, and Soccer.

Participants: freshman football players.

Peer Mentoring Program (PMP): addition to the extant EAGLE Center program to enhance connections of freshman football players by assigning them to peer mentors and peer mentor groups for the purpose of social interactions.

Semi-structured small-group interactions: Meetings and activities conceived of and organized by the peer mentors to allow social interactions between peer

mentors and their freshmen mentees and between the freshmen as a group.

Includes such things as meeting for coffee at Starbucks, cooking out at someone's house, football watch parties, and Game Night at the EAGLE Center.

Social interactions: any engagement between two or more persons. Includes texting, talking, meeting, etc.

Social Interactions Survey: 11 question survey administered to Participants and Non-Participants at midterm and finals assessing perceptions of social interactions and ranking connections. See Appendix C.

Socialization: on-going process by which individuals learn social rules of conduct.

Socialization Resources Audit: 22 Likert-type (rating) questions and two open ended questions addressing perceptions regarding the peer mentoring program as a resource. Administered at finals only to Participants. See Appendix D.

Socialization Resources Theory (SRT): theory, specific to organizational socialization, offered by Saks and Gruman in 2012 that focuses on availability of resources to aid in social adjustment.

Student-Athlete Services (S-AS): a division of the Athletics Department at Morehead State University which focuses on academic eligibility of student-athletes.

Upper-class: Any student-athlete above freshman level; i.e., sophomores, juniors, seniors.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Retention of freshman student-athletes is a continual focus for the Athletics Department at many institutes of higher learning (Brecht, 2014; Carrier, 2013; Hamilton, 2005; Johnson, Wessel, & Pierce, 2013; Person & LeNoir, 1997; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). The subpopulation of freshman student-athletes represent a time and money commitment that begs for a positive return-on-investment as evidenced by retention on their team and in their academic life. Of particular interest at Morehead State University (MSU) are freshman football players.

Statement of Initial Problem

For consecutive years it was noted that a large number of freshmen left the football program at MSU. From fall 2015 to fall 2016, the attrition rate was 58%; from fall 2016 to fall 2017, 53%. When departing freshmen were questioned by their staff mentor about their decision to leave, a recurring theme was that they just did not feel they belonged. Other sports at MSU have a financial incentive to aid in retention, but football is a non-scholarship sport. There is no financial incentive directly related to being part of the MSU football program. Those on academic scholarship may leave the football program, but remain at MSU. The lack of financial incentive requires another means of engagement to achieve the connection and commitment for freshman football players. The goal of the staff at the EAGLE Center is to keep student-athletes engaged both academically and socially.

Description of Organization and Situation

The division of Student-Athlete Services (S-AS), part of the Athletics Department at MSU, is housed in the EAGLE Center. EAGLE is an acronym for Eagle Athletic Guided Learning Enhancement. In fall 2019, the EAGLE Center was staffed by two full-time and one part-time staff members, and two graduate assistants, all who serve as staff mentors for assigned teams of student-athletes. S-AS serves approximately three hundred (300) student-athletes at any given time. These student-athletes are divided into a dozen sports – men's, women's, and mixed teams. The bulk of the numbers – nearly one-third – are football players. Approximately one-third of the football players are incoming freshmen each year. That means thirty to thirty-five freshman football players are arriving each fall semester. Most freshman football players do not play their freshman year. They are red-shirted and relegated to the practice squad. For many this is an unsettling experience. Having risen to the attention of Division I coaches by being the outstanding athlete at their high school, now they are just one of many exceptional athletes.

At Morehead State University, all student-athletes are required to participate in the EAGLE Center program through the fall and spring semesters of their freshman year. The EAGLE Center program has three components: staff mentoring, study and/or life skills workshops, and weekly study hall. First, freshman student-athletes are assigned to a staff mentor with whom they meet on a weekly basis during the fall semester and either weekly or bi-weekly during the spring semester. These meetings target academics and discussions include any upcoming assignments; grades received

on completed assignments; any tutorial needs; and establishment and review of weekly academic, athletic, and personal goals. Staff also provide time management and organization techniques. Second, student-athletes are required to attend at least six self-selected study and/or life skills workshops during their freshman year. Finally, all freshman student-athletes are required to participate in a minimum of five hours of study hall per week. Some coaches place higher study hall hour requirements on their student-athletes. For example, all women's softball players, not just freshmen, must complete at least eight (8) hours of study hall per week.

The original EAGLE Center program did not address social connections of freshman athletes. As an academic-athletic center, the EAGLE Center focuses on academics. Recognizing the lack of a social component to the program and the need for an additional engagement/connection-related element, student retention literature was consulted (Astin, 1977, 1993, 1999; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979a, 1979b, 1980; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1999, 2006; Vendituoli, 2014) and peer mentoring was suggested. During the fall of 2019, incoming freshman athletes were placed in cohorts. "For research purposes, a cohort is any group of individuals who are linked in some way or who have experienced the same significant life event within a given period" (Web Center, 2011). A problem was identified: freshman football recruits were failing to achieve a sense of belonging resulting in the decision to leave the program and/or the university. It was determined that these student-athletes were not socially engaged and were subsequently not retained. An investigation was conducted into retention theory practices to help

provide a better understanding of the problem. Peer mentoring was proposed as an innovative intervention that would benefit both sides of the relationship. Freshman football players would receive social support needed to feel a part of the team and peer mentors would receive leadership development training. Existing resources in the forms of peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional websites, dissertations, and books were consulted for direction in program development and materials to assist with both development and assessment of the program (Baker & Siryk, 1989; Berry, 2014; Chao, 2009; Charles, 2016; Cook & Jones, 2016; Goos, 2013; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Hamlin & Sage, 2011; Krotseng, 1992; Mitchell, 2013; Murray, 2017; Raspante, 2014; Sanchez, Bauer, & Paronto, 2006).

Statement of Capstone Problem

The peer mentoring program was initiated as a pilot program in fall 2018 to aid in socialization and support of freshman football players for the purpose of increasing engagement and connection with the football team, the Athletics Department, and Morehead State University (MSU). Following the pilot year, data collected was reviewed and used to help modify the program's direction to benefit the entire athletic program. Data-driven justification for the modification to the EAGLE Center program was requested by the Athletics Administration to determine the desirability of extending the modification to other sports. Several questions arose:

- 1) Does participation in the peer mentoring program increase social interactions; that is, contacts with other MSU students, the team, the Athletics Department, and the University?

- 2) Does participation in the peer mentoring program increase perceptions of connections with other MSU students, the team, the Athletics Department, and the University?
- 3) Is the peer mentoring program perceived to be an effective socialization resource by program Participants?

Based upon these questions, five hypotheses were developed:

- 1) There will be no statistical difference between peer mentoring program Participants and Non-Participants in Anticipation Survey responses.
- 2) There will be no statistical difference between peer mentoring program Participants and Non-Participants in perceptions when asked to describe their social interactions with various persons and groups.
- 3) There will be no statistical difference between peer mentoring program Participants and Non-Participants in perceptions when questioned regarding their connections with their team, the Athletic Department, and the University.
- 4) Socialization resources will be found to exist (identified) by program Participants.
- 5) Socialization resources will be found to be effective by program Participants.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Related Research for the Initial Problem

An investigation of theories relating to student retention (Astin, 1977, 1993, 1999; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979a, 1979b, 1980; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1999, 2006; Vendituoli, 2014) was begun to further educate those involved in the implementation of the program. Next, mentoring as an intervention strategy was examined to determine if the process was impacting student athletes in a positive manner. The literature reviews compiled by Merriam (1983), Jacobi (1991), and Crisp and Cruz (2009) were consulted with focus on peer mentoring. Two very good definitions of mentoring were offered by Lester & Johnson (1981): “a function of educational institutions...defined as a one-to-one learning relationship between an older person and a younger person that is based on modeling behavior and extended dialogue” (p. 110) and by Shandley (1989) who noted it is an intentional, nurturing, and insightful process. Kram (1988) described mentoring as a developmental relationship. This was added to by numerous other researchers (Bell, 2000; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Zachary, 2000) who characterize the relationship as reciprocal learning focusing on goal attainment and personal growth. “The professional literature, the popular press, and students themselves seem to agree that mentoring is a critical component of effective undergraduate education” (Jacobi, 1991, p. 505). Students who are academically and socially connected to other students and to their institution are more likely to persist and graduate compared to those who are not connected (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Peer mentoring was chosen as an

addition to the current staff mentoring program, not as a replacement. The peer mentors are upperclassmen who make themselves available on individual and small group arrangements to offer insight and to model success in athletics and academics. They serve as examples and share experiences. The importance of peer mentor training to increase student sense of belonging (Asgari & Carter, 2016; Edwards, 2010; Henert, 1995; Holt & Berwise, 2012; Roscoe, 2011; Rosenthal & Shinebarger, 2010; Terenzini et al, 1994; Townsend-Green, 2009) and possible benefits for both mentors and mentees (Budge, 2006; Thies-Sprinthall, 1986; Zevallos & Washburn, 2014) was recognized. Leadership development (Anderson, 2012; Astin, 1993; Dugan, Kodama, Correia, & Associates, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2006; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Thompson, 2006; Vidic & Burton, 2011) as a by-product of peer mentoring, was examined and added as a secondary purpose in the use of peer mentors. Finally, a review of resources with potential for assisting in program development and on-going evaluation was conducted (Baker & Siryk, 1989; Berry, 2014; Chao, 2009; Charles, 2016; Cook & Jones, 2016; Goos, 2013; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Hamlin & Sage, 2011; Krotseng, 1992; Mitchell, 2013; Murray, 2017; Raspante, 2014; Sanchez, Bauer, & Paronto, 2006).

Related Research for the Capstone Problem

Socialization literature has been growing since the 1960s (Schein, 1968) with the most cited definition of socialization being that it is a “process by which an

individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Early socialization research looked at the role of the organization in socialization (Feldman, 1976, 1981; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and offered stage models. An increased emphasis on individual experiences and actions followed (Ashforth & Saks, 1996, Jones, 1983; Morrison, 1993; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). More recently socialization research has considered organizational actions and individual actions as two sides of a coin which together make a complete process (Bauer et al, 2007; Chao, 2012; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Peer mentoring meets this need from two sides by providing the resource – the peer mentors – but requiring that the individuals – freshmen – reach out and participate in the programming. Peer mentors are not perfect individuals with perfect backgrounds and wonderful experiences. They are student-athletes who have overcome challenges and persevered who now offer insights gained by those experiences to others following in their footsteps.

The process of socialization has seen many external theories applied to it including anxiety/uncertainty reduction (Berger, 1979; Greenberger & Strasser, 1986), person-environment fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Cable & Parsons, 2001; Edwards, 1996; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005), and social identity (Ashforth et al, 2007; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) offered theories specific to socialization and related to tactics employed by organizations. Nicholson (1984) suggested a model of newcomer adjustment which he theorized led to personal development and role development.

The socialization process should be ongoing with success of the process based upon the desired outcomes. So, is the purpose simply acquisition of knowledge and skills or does it include establishment of connections resulting in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to remain? Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012) note that

of the three indicators of newcomer adjustment studied in Bauer et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis of the socialization literature, only 'gaining social acceptance' was significantly related to all five of the outcomes studied: job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover, and intentions to remain. (p. 13)

Numerous socialization practices have been employed by organizations to facilitate the process (Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Lundberg & Young, 1997; Nelson & Quick, 1991) with five practices receiving the most attention: orientation programs, training programs, socialization tactics, job characteristics, and socialization agents (Saks & Gruman, 2012). Desired outcomes have been divided into proximal (e.g., role clarity, task mastery) and distal (e.g., organizational commitment, job satisfaction) and examined regarding their linkages (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007; Bauer et al, 2007; Bauer & Green, 1998; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007).

Saks and Gruman (2012) offered a new theory specific to organizational socialization that they termed Socialization Resources Theory (SRT). This theory "focuses on the resources newcomers require for successful adjustment to their jobs,

roles, workgroup, and the organization” and “consists of a comprehensive set of resources that newcomers can draw on to manage the transition” (p. 45). SRT offers seventeen dimensions addressing “specific socialization resources that can facilitate newcomer adjustment and socialization” (Saks & Gruman, 2012, p. 46). Proper questioning regarding these dimensions can serve as a socialization resources audit. Four dimensions are grouped as social capital resources. These include social events, socialization agents, supervisor support, and relationship development. Socialization agents, which include peer mentors, were noted as “extremely important and integral” to the socialization of newcomers (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998 as noted in Saks & Gruman, 2012, p. 39) especially as an informal form of support. Numerous studies (Allen, McManus, & Russell, 1999; Blau, 1988; Chatman, 1991; Kram, 1988; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993) examined mentoring relative to information provision and social support. Positive support from supervisors goes beyond information provision and task related support. Social support is predictive of socialization outcomes (Bauer & Green, 1998; Bauer et al., 1998; Fisher, 1986; Major et al., 1995). Several studies (Feldman and Brett, 1983; Korte, 2010; Louis et al., 1983; Nelson & Quick, 1991) found that relational attachments rank high in socialization and newcomer adjustment.

Saks and Gruman (2012) conclude their theory presentation with a request for continued research aimed at answering the question: “*What organizational socialization practices are most effective?*” (p. 53, emphasis original). They suggest

several avenues that need to be traversed toward answering this question. Research is needed

on the relationships between each of the socialization resources and the various proximal and distal outcomes...as well as research on when to provide particular resources, the best way to provide each resource, and research on bundles or packages of resources and how they relate to the different [desired] socialization outcomes. (Saks & Gruman, 2012, p. 53)

The first three hypotheses being tested relative to the addition of peer mentoring for the freshman football players address any possible differences in the perceptions of program Participants and Non-Participants. The fourth and fifth hypotheses directly relate to socialization resources; specifically, do Participants recognize the availability of resources and do they perceive them as effective?

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this capstone project was to assess the impact of the new peer mentoring program on the perceptions regarding social interactions and connections for freshman student-athletes and to ascertain the recognition by program Participants of the peer mentoring program as an effective resource. Two groups of freshman student-athletes were formed for the purposes of this project. Participants, were comprised of all freshman football players entering Morehead State University in fall 2019. Non-Participants, were comprised of all freshman student-athletes from baseball, men's cross country, softball, and soccer entering Morehead State University in fall 2019. It is of note that additional data may be parsed based upon gender or sport, but neither of these distinctions are relevant to the questions posed for this project.

Procedures

Both Participants and Non-Participants were given an Anticipation Survey (see Appendix A) at the start of fall semester, a Social Interactions Survey (see Appendix B) at midterm and finals, and a Comfort, Connection, and Opinion Survey (hereafter referred to as Connections Survey, see Appendix C) at midterm and finals. Additionally, Participants were given a Socialization Resources Audit (see Appendix D) at finals. Data gathered from all surveys (see Appendix E for a link) was analyzed via t-tests to determine if there was any statistical difference between Participants and Non-Participants in the anticipation levels, the perceptions of social interactions, and the perceptions of connections. Additionally, recognition by Participants of the

presence and perception of the effectiveness of peer mentoring as a socialization resource was examined via measures of central tendency and of variation. The use of open-ended questions on the surveys allowed for collection of qualitative data which was consulted to answer the “why” in interpreting the data.

Timeline

This capstone involved analysis of the impacts of a program already extant at MSU. Data was gathered at three time points during fall 2019 – at the beginning of the semester, at midterm, and at finals. Accumulation of all data was completed by December 13, 2019. Analysis of all data was completed by February 14, 2020. A final report on the initial findings of the Peer Mentoring component of the EAGLE Center program for student-athletes will be delivered to the Director of Student-Athlete Services and the MSU Athletic Director before the end of the spring 2020 semester.

Collaborations

While this is an individual project wholly conceived and executed by the primary researcher, Angela Meyer, Athletic Learning Coordinator in the EAGLE Center, it is recognized that others have input and impact on this project.

- Drew Barnette, Director of Student-Athlete Services, provides support for the EAGLE Center programming and serves as a staff mentor.
- Dallas Sammons, Delaina White, and Raine Wireman serve as part-time staff mentors.
- Mik Aoki, Head Baseball Coach, allows surveying of freshman student-athletes.

- Samantha Jones, Head Softball Coach, allows surveying of freshman student-athletes.
- Warren Lipka, Head Soccer Coach, allows surveying of freshman student-athletes.
- Clay Dixon, Interim Head Cross Country Coach, allows surveying of freshman student-athletes.
- Rob Tenyer, Head Football Coach, provided and continues to provide consultation regarding the selection of peer mentors for the program, supported and will continue to support efforts regarding the peer mentoring program and the monthly workshop meetings, allows surveying of freshman student-athletes, and encourages freshman football players to take advantage of the programming offered through the EAGLE Center.
- Peer mentors, selected with recommendations from the football staff, consist of upper-class football players exhibiting leadership potential. They commit to attending training before school begins, to being actively engaged in planning and executing social interactions with their assigned freshmen football players ongoing through the semester (a huge time commitment), and to completing paperwork related to tracking the peer mentoring program's social interactions (a small, but not insignificant time commitment).

Chapter 4: Observations and Discussion

The Anticipation Survey (Table 1.) was administered during the first week of classes during the fall 2019 semester. The Anticipation Survey, piloted in the 2018 run of the peer mentoring program, was comprised of eight (8) statements which respondents were asked to rate from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). It tested Hypothesis 1: There will be no statistical significance in the anticipation levels for Participants and Non-Participants. All statements were positive; so, the closer to five (5), the higher the positive anticipation. Participants responses ranged from 3.52 to 4.52; Non-Participants from 4.66 to 4.97. The average response from Participants was 4.285; Non-Participants, 4.833. Although Non-Participants reported higher anticipation levels than Participants, a t-test determined that the difference between the means was not statistically significant with $p = 0.0022$ supporting Hypothesis 1.

Table 1

Anticipation Survey

	Average Response	
	Participant	Non-Participant
1. I am excited to begin my time at MSU.	4.36	4.90
2. I am excited to begin my time as a member of the team.	4.52	4.96
3. I am excited about the Peer Mentoring Program.	3.52	n/a
4. I anticipate doing well academically in college.	4.52	4.69
5. I anticipate creating new friendships in college.	4.48	4.97
6. I have a primary academic goal.	4.24	4.72
7. I have an athletic goal.	4.48	4.93
8. I have a personal goal.	4.16	4.66

The Social Interactions Survey was administered to each group – Participants and Non-Participants – twice; at midterm and at finals. It was derived from a combination of survey instruments but was completely developed for this exploration of responses by program participants. It asked respondents to describe their social interactions in different ways and different forms. It asked about daily and weekly interactions. It asked about perception (feeling) with regard to social interactions increasing connection and whether it was a good use of time. Finally, it addressed respondent's perception of connection to different types of persons and asked them to rank those connections.

Responses to the first three questions tested Hypothesis 2: There will be no statistical difference between Participants and Non-Participants in perceptions when asked to describe their social interactions. The change in the response rates was calculated for each group from midterm to final. A t-test was then run using the percentage changes for Participants versus Non-Participants. The test yielded $p = 0.12898$ meaning a finding of some statistical significance in the difference of the means for Participants and Non-Participants. So, the change in the descriptions by Participants was significant when compared to the change in descriptions by Non-Participants. The percentage of Participants reporting daily or continual social interactions had a positive change (+25%) while Non-Participants reported a negative change (-19%). More Participants (+12.5%) perceived social interactions as significant to feelings of connection with the team and the school from midterm to finals. While Non-Participants actually declined (-0.7%) in perception of social

interactions as significant. Both Participants and Non-Participants reported most social interactions as in-person.

The sixth question on the Social Interactions Survey asked about daily interactions. All respondents reported daily interactions with teammates at midterm and at finals. From midterm to final, Participants saw a large increase in daily interactions with other MSU students (+18.8%), while Non-Participants saw a similar increase (+10.5%) with family and friends from home. The seventh question addressed weekly interactions and reinforced the findings from the daily question. Participants weekly interactions with family and friends from home saw a large drop (-12.5%) while Non-Participants drop was in interactions with people from school – teammates (-6.5%), staff mentors (-10.9%), and other MSU students (-8.7%). T-tests comparing the percentage changes for Participants versus Non-Participants yielded daily $p = 0.8184$ and weekly $p = 0.2060$; both significant.

The eighth and ninth questions were about perception of social interactions with regard to increasing connections with their team and whether it is a good use of time. At midterm, Participants were split 50/50 between somewhat and absolutely feeling that social interactions increase team connections and 50/50 as to whether social interactions were a good use of time. By finals, Participants had shifted to 75% absolutely for increasing connections and 81.25% absolutely a good use of time. At midterm, Non-Participants were 77.8% absolutely for increasing connections and 74.1% absolutely a good use of time. Both responses from Non-Participants rose

slightly at finals; absolutely increasing connections, jumped 10% to 87.5%; absolutely good use of time, saw a slight rise to 75%.

The final question on the Social Interactions Survey asked respondents to rank their perception (feeling) of connection with various types of persons from highest (1) to lowest (5). So, closer to one (1) equates to greater perception of connection. As shown in Table 2 and Table 3, at midterm, Participants order ranged from connection with family and friends from home (1.25) to coaches (4.00) while Non-Participants ranged from teammates (1.78) to staff mentors (3.74). For Participants, teammates was second (2.13) and for Non-Participants, family and friends from home connections was second (2.04). At finals, the order for Participants connections had not changed and there were only slight shifts in the weight attributed to different types of persons. The largest positive change was with regard to connections with other MSU students (+0.43) while the largest drop was connection to coaches (-0.375). For Non-Participants, the bottom of the order – connection with other MSU students and connection with staff mentors – switched places. The change from midterm to finals for Non-Participants perceptions of connections with teammates and family and friends from home both rose, 0.37 and 0.22 respectively. The change in perceptions of connections with coaches (-0.40) and with other MSU students (-0.44) both declined significantly. These responses reinforce the findings from questions six and seven regarding with whom they had daily and weekly social interactions. Many of the midterm to finals changes appear to support an observation of inversion for perceptions for Participants versus Non-Participants.

Table 2.*Connection Order - Participants*

Midterm		Finals	
Type of Person	Average Rank	Type of Person	Average Rank
Family and friends from home	1.25	Family and friends from home	1.44
Teammates	2.13	Teammates	2.00
Other MSU students	3.81	Other MSU students	3.38
Peer Mentors	3.81	Peer Mentors	3.81
Coaches	4.00	Coaches	4.38

Table 3.*Connection Order - Non-Participants*

Midterm		Finals	
Type of Person	Average Rank	Type of Person	Average Rank
Teammates	1.78	Teammates	1.41
Family and friends from home	2.04	Family and friends from home	1.82
Coaches	2.89	Coaches	3.29
Other MSU students	3.44	Staff Mentors	3.71
Staff Mentors	3.74	Other MSU students	3.88

Like the Social Interactions Survey, the Connections Survey was administered to each group – Participants and Non-Participants – twice; at midterm and at finals.

Like the Anticipation Survey, the Connections survey was piloted during the 2018 program run. It asked respondents to rate their comfort with discussing academic and personal issues with coaches, staff mentors, and teammates or peers. It also asked for ratings of connections with various types of persons and groups. The backside of the survey questioned respondents about who they would consult if they had issues with different types of persons. The final question asked about choosing their own mentor.

The first and second questions on the Connections survey addressed the issue of comfort in discussing academic and personal issues with coaches, staff mentors, and teammates. The scale used was “would not discuss” (1) to “completely comfortable” (5). The higher the number, the higher the level of comfort. At midterm, Participants were most comfortable discussing both academic and personal issues with teammates. By finals, Participants had shifted comfort for academic discussions to staff mentors. Non-Participants went the opposite direction. At midterm they were more comfortable discussing academic issues with staff mentors, but this shifted to teammates. For personal issues it was and remained teammates. Interestingly, comfort discussing any issues with coaches rose for Participants from midterm to finals (+0.63 academic, +0.77 personal) while it fell for Non-Participants (-0.44 academic, -0.21 personal).

The third question on the Connections Survey asked respondents to rate their connection with various persons and groups from 1 (not connected) to 5 (completely connected); higher number equals higher connection. This tested Hypothesis 3: There will be no statistical difference between Participants and Non-Participants in perceptions when questioned regarding their connections with their team, the department, and the University. At midterm, Participants responses ranged from 3.19 to 4.44; Non-Participants, from 3.48 to 4.81. The mean for Participants was 3.808; for Non-Participants, 4.172. The t-test yielded $p = 0.0697$, a very slight statistical significance in the difference of the means. At finals, Participants responses ranged from 3.5 to 4.56; Non-Participants, from 3.82 to 4.94. The mean for Participants was

4.032; for Non-Participants, 4.4. The t-test yielded $p = 0.0526$, a very slight statistical significance in the difference of the means. The change from midterm to finals for each group was then calculated and a t-test was run for Participant change versus Non-Participant change. Participants had two negative changes in perception of connections, with instructors (-0.02) and with staff mentors (-0.10). Non-Participants had one negative change in perception of connections with coaches (-0.18). Participants reported positive changes of over $\frac{1}{2}$ point for coaches (+0.86), team (+0.68), and the Athletics Department and MSU (both +0.55). Non-Participants highest positive change in perception of connection was +0.40 for staff mentors. The comparison of changes for perceptions of connections for Participants versus Non-Participants had greater statistical significance ($p = 0.2459$) than the changes from midterm to finals within each group.

The backside of the Connections Survey – questions four, five, and six – addressed who respondents would consult if faced with an issue with an instructor, a coach, or a teammate. Responses showed little change from midterm to finals or between Participants and Non-Participants. The final question asked about who respondents would prefer as a mentor. At midterm just over half of all respondents (51.2%) preferred a teammate or peer as a mentor. By finals this preference rose to 63.6% of respondents with a staff member coming in second at 48.5%.

One final survey was administered, but only to Participants. The Socialization Resources Audit (SRA) questioned program Participants to assess their perceptions with regard to various aspects of the peer mentoring program in the form it was

presented to them. Sixteen (16) Participants responded to the SRA. They were asked to rate statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For positively worded statements a higher number indicates a positive perception. Table 4 shows positive responses which averaged above 4.00.

Table 4.

Socialization Resources Audit (SRA) - Average responses above 4.00.

4.44	8. I think there were enough social activities this semester.
4.38	3. I like my peer mentors.
4.38	16. My staff mentor has helped with my transition to college.
4.31	4. I found my peer mentors to be helpful in understanding my sport.
4.31	13. I like other members of my freshman cohort.
4.31	17. My peer mentor(s) have helped with my transition to college.
4.25	10. I enjoyed the social activities this semester.
4.19	15. I like the staff mentor I meet with weekly.
4.13	7. I enjoyed the social activities organized by my peer mentors.
4.06	6. I found my peer mentors to be helpful with personal issues.
4.00	19. The majority of my close associations are with student-athletes.

For negatively worded statements a lower number indicates disagreement with the statement or a positive perception. Statements 9, 11, 18, and 20 were negatively worded or aimed. Table 5 shows averages of responses to negative statements.

Table 5.

Socialization Resources Audit (SRA) - Average responses below 3.00.

3.00	18. I participate in social activities outside Athletics.
2.75	20. The majority of my close associations are with non-athlete students.
2.25	11. I did not enjoy the social activities this semester.
2.13	9. I do not think there were enough social activities this semester.

Participants were also asked to identify the social activities they liked best (open ended question #22) and to provide any additional insights (open ended

question #23). More than half of respondents mentioned Game Night. Other social activities noted included the scavenger hunt, going to the Rec, Monday Night Football, and “just hanging out.” With regard to insights, respondents offered that they “enjoyed it,” saw it as “a good resource and person to talk to,” and that the program and peer mentors were helpful. Only one participant offered the comment that they “need more interactions with peer mentors.” However, this perception was reinforced by the peer mentors who expressed that they would rather have only one or two freshman mentees rather than the three or four they were given to allow for more individual interactions.

Chapter 5: Limitations, Conclusions, and Recommended Actions

Limitations

It is recognized that all studies are subject to various limitations, this one is no exception. Most obvious is the fact that this was a very small being examined. It was not directly matched for comparison purposes; differing in number, gender, sport, and participation status. It cannot be replicated to the same degree demonstrated at Morehead State University. It was meant to provide a baseline assessment and a snapshot of the impact of an activity and demonstrate a possible solution to a recognized problem.

Attrition was a problem, but this study looked at increasing the desire of student-athletes to remain at MSU (retention) rather than why student-athletes leave (attrition). Loss of study participants was not even across the two groups, Participants and Non-Participants. Loss, defined as quitting the athletic team, results from many factors not necessarily accounted for in this study; such as, loss of academic eligibility, injury, choosing academics over athletics, etc. The loss of a survey respondent means missing data and precludes a good examination of changes to individual perceptions across time.

Another limitation is selection bias, participants were part of a predetermined group – all freshman football players at the start of fall 2019. The Non-Participants group was generated by combining all fall 2019 freshmen from four different sports which include both male and female student-athletes. The selection of the sports for

Non-Participants is based upon the sports being considered for future peer mentoring programming.

Questions regarding perceptions are inherently biased (Balcetis & Dunning, 2007; Taylor & Brown, 1988; Thompson, Armstrong, & Thomas, 1998). Also, the use of survey instruments coupled with knowledge of the study being conducted has the possibility of bias due to respondents desire to please the questioner.

Conclusions

Three questions were posed leading to this study: Does participation in the PMP increase social interactions; that is, contacts with other MSU students, the team, the Athletics Department, and the University? Does participation in the PMP increase perceptions of connectedness with other MSU students, the team, the Athletics Department, and the University? Is the PMP perceived as an effective socialization resource? From these questions, five hypotheses were derived to be tested.

H₁: There will be no statistical difference between peer mentoring program Participants and Non-Participants in Anticipation Survey responses. This hypothesis was tested and supported ($p = 0.0022$).

H₂: There will be no statistical difference between peer mentoring program Participants and Non-Participants in perceptions when asked to describe their social interactions with various persons and groups. This hypothesis was tested with questions on the Social Interactions Survey and was not supported. There is some statistical significance in the change in descriptions by Participants versus Non-Participants from midterm to finals.

H₃: There will be no statistical difference between peer mentoring program Participants and Non-Participants in perceptions when questioned regarding their connections with their team, the Athletics Department, and the University. This hypothesis was tested with questions on the Comfort, Connection, and Opinion Survey and was not supported. There is slight statistical difference in perceptions of connections at both midterm ($p = 0.0697$) and finals ($p = 0.0526$) for Participants versus Non-Participants. Additionally, there is statistical significance in the differences as exhibited by change in perceptions of connections from midterm to finals ($p = 0.2459$) for Participants versus Non-Participants.

H₄: Socialization resources will be found to exist (identified) by program Participants and H₅: Socialization resources will be found to be effective by program Participants were tested with twenty-one statements on a Socialization Resources Audit with a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Of the seventeen positively worded statements, eleven rated higher than four (4) indicating agreement with the statements. For the four negatively aimed statements, all rated below three (3) indicating disagreement with the statements or a positive response to the program. Two open-ended questions solicited additional input from Participants. Responses indicate Participants enjoyed the experience and found it to be helpful.

Initial findings indicate that participation in the peer mentoring program increases the social interactions and perceptions of connectedness of Participants with school people and school affiliations as opposed to home connections (friends and family). Data gathered through the Social Interactions Survey suggests that

participation in the PMP does increase social interactions with teammates, their athletic team, and the University when compared to PMP Non-Participants who showed increased connections with home. Additionally, it showed increase in connections with other MSU students for Participants, further reinforcing their connection with the school. Opposite these observations are those for the Non-Participants. Non-Participants fell off in all interactions with people from school and increased interactions with home.

Connectedness was questioned by the Comfort, Connection, and Opinion Survey. PMP Participants showed increased comfort in all areas except discussing academic issues with teammates or peers which fell very slightly. This was countered by a substantial increase in comfort discussing personal issues with teammates. This indicates a growing connection. Non-Participants comfort discussing academic or personal issues with coaches fell. Interestingly, Non-Participants comfort discussing academic issues with Staff Mentors fell while discussing personal issues rose.

The peer mentoring program was deemed by Participants to be a good resource and seemed to increase strength of connections between teammates. As a side note, some of those who left Participant status remained at the University and continued interactions with former teammates.

Recommended Actions

Based upon the findings of this initial study, it is recommended that the study be repeated for at least two to five more years with gradual inclusion of additional teams as Participants. It is further recommended that the peer mentoring program be

offered to the soccer team for implementation fall 2020. To offset the shift of soccer freshmen to Participant status, it is suggested that Women's Cross Country freshmen be added to Non-Participants.

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Appendix A

Anticipation Survey

Please rate the following statements on a scale of **1** (Strongly Disagree) to **5** (Strongly Agree) by marking an **X** in the box below the number.

<u>Statement</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
1. I am excited to begin my time at Morehead State University.					
2. I am excited to begin my time as a member of an MSU athletic team.					
3. I am excited about the Peer Mentoring Program.					
4. I anticipate doing well academically in college.					
5. I anticipate creating new friendships in college.					
6. I have a primary academic goal.					
7. I have a primary athletic goal.					
8. I have a primary personal goal.					

DISAGREE AGREE

Appendix B

Social Interactions Survey

m _____

I would describe my social interactions as (*check one*)

- ☐ minimal ☐ daily ☐ weekly ☐ continual

I would also describe my social interactions as (*check one*)

- ☐ significant to feelings of connection with team and school.
☐ unimportant to feelings of connection with team and school.

Most of my social interactions are (*check one*)

- ☐ in person ☐ via text
☐ via telephone ☐ via social media (FaceBook, SnapChat, Twitter, etc.)

In the last 2 months, my social interactions have been (*check all that apply*)

- ☐ phone conversations ☐ face-to-face, multi-person meetings
☐ text conversations ☐ unplanned activities/chance encounters
☐ face-to-face, one-to-one meetings ☐ planned activities

List up to 5 social interactions you have engaged in recently:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

I have daily social interactions with (*check all that apply*)

- ☐ my teammates ☐ other MSU students
☐ my peer mentors ☐ friends/family from home

I have weekly social interactions with (*check all that apply*)

- ☐ my teammates ☐ other MSU students
☐ my peer mentors ☐ friends/family from home

I feel that my social interactions increase my connection with my team. (*check one*)

☐ not at all ☐ somewhat ☐ absolutely

I feel that my social interactions are a good use of my time. (*check one*)

☐ not at all ☐ somewhat ☐ absolutely

With regard to the previous question, why or why not?

For the following persons, please rank them 1 (highest) to 5 (lowest) regarding your feeling of connection.

- coaches
- teammates
- peer mentor(s)
- other MSU students
- friends/family from home

Appendix C

Comfort, Connection, and Opinion Survey

m _____

For the following questions: 1 – would not discuss, 3 – neutral, 5 – completely comfortable

Rate your comfort level with discussing **academic issues**

with your **Coach** 1 2 3 4 5

with your **Staff Mentor** 1 2 3 4 5

with a **teammate or peer** 1 2 3 4 5

Rate your comfort level with discussing **personal issues**

with your **Coach** 1 2 3 4 5

with your **Staff Mentor** 1 2 3 4 5

with a **teammate or peer** 1 2 3 4 5

For the following questions: 1 = not connected, 3 = neutral, 5 = completely connected

Rate your connection with your **family** 1 2 3 4 5

your **friends from home** 1 2 3 4 5

your **friends from MSU** 1 2 3 4 5

your **teammates** 1 2 3 4 5

your **instructors** 1 2 3 4 5

your **Coach(es)** 1 2 3 4 5

your **Staff Mentor** 1 2 3 4 5

your **team (as a group)** 1 2 3 4 5

the **Athletics Department** 1 2 3 4 5

Morehead State University 1 2 3 4 5

If you had an issue with an instructor, who would you speak with for advice/assistance:

(check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> the instructor | <input type="checkbox"/> your Staff Mentor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> another instructor | <input type="checkbox"/> a teammate/peer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a Coach | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

If you had an issue with a Coach, who would you speak with for advice/assistance:

(check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> the Coach | <input type="checkbox"/> your Staff Mentor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> another Coach | <input type="checkbox"/> a teammate/peer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> an instructor | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

If you had an issue with a teammate, who would you speak with for advice/assistance:

(check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> the teammate | <input type="checkbox"/> your Staff Mentor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> another teammate/peer | <input type="checkbox"/> an instructor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a Coach | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

If you could choose your own Mentor, would you prefer:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a Staff Member | <input type="checkbox"/> a teammate/peer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a Coach | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Appendix D

Socialization Resources Audit

Please rate the following statements on a scale of **1** (Strongly Disagree) to **5** (Strongly Agree) by marking an **X** in the box below the number.

Statement	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
1. I remember taking an Anticipation Survey at the Orientation meeting.					
2. I enjoyed the get-to-know-you games at the Orientation meeting.					
3. I like my peer mentors.					
4. I found my peer mentors to be helpful in understanding my sport.					
5. I found my peer mentors to be helpful with academics.					
6. I found my peer mentors to be helpful with personal issues.					
7. I enjoyed the social activities organized by my peer mentors.					
8. I think there were enough social activities this semester.					
9. I do not think there were enough social activities this semester.					
10. I enjoyed the social activities this semester.					
11. I did not enjoy the social activities this semester.					
12. I like having workshops in a monthly meeting format.					
13. I like the other members of my freshman cohort.					
14. I like the coaching staff for my sport.					
15. I like the staff mentor I meet with weekly.					
16. My staff mentor has helped with my transition to college.					
17. My peer mentor(s) have helped with my transition to college.					
18. I participate in social activities outside athletics. (clubs, Greeks, intramurals, etc.)					
19. The majority of my close associations are with student-athletes.					
20. The majority of my close associations are with non-athlete students.					
21. I think peer mentoring activities are a good use of time for freshman student-athletes.					
22. The social activities I liked best: _____					
23. Additional insights about the program, the peer mentors, anything else? _____					

m _____

Adapted from Saks & Gruman (2012), p. 48.

Appendix E

Link to Raw Data

This link can be used to view the raw data and notes related to the analysis of information obtained from surveys during Fall 2019.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ilu542cm6njkicc/FA19%20Survey%20Responses.xlsx?dl=0>

Pull up the link then download the item. It will open as an Excel workbook. The tabs are color coded.

Dark Blue = Participant data

Light Blue = Non-Participant data, aggregated

Dark Green = Participant versus Non-Participant comparisons

Light Green = Midterm to Finals Change comparisons

Gold = Socialization Resources Audit (SRA) data

Red = Non-Participant data, individual teams

VITA

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EDUCATION

May 1991	Bachelor of Science Troy State University Troy, Alabama
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November, 1998 – June, 2001	Associate Economic Strategy Center (ESC), Inc./ National Community Development Services (NCDS), Inc. Atlanta, Georgia
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