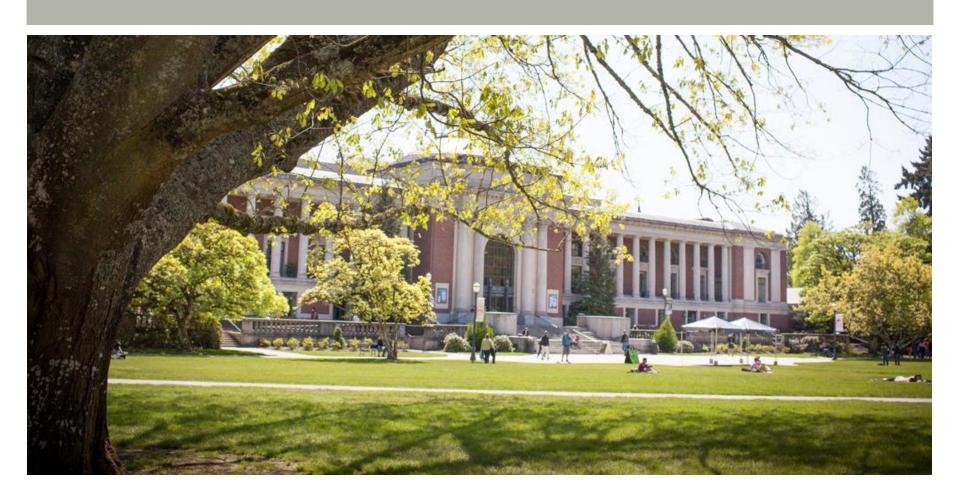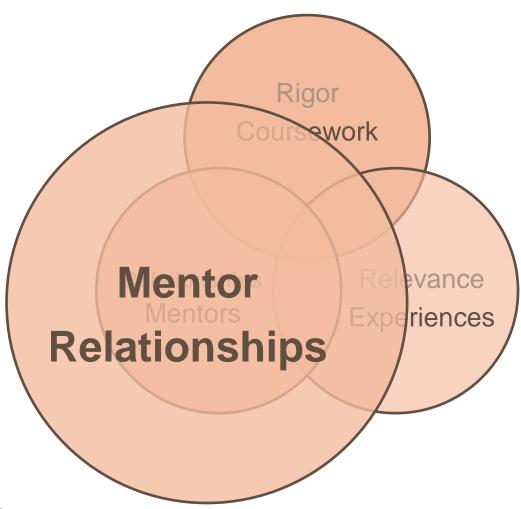# Developing Robust Mentoring Relationships in a College of Agricultural Sciences Leadership Development Program

Kellie A. Strawn, Aaron J. McKim, Jonathan J. Velez, & Misty D. Lambert
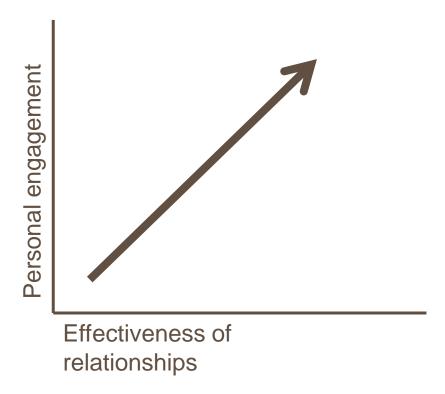
# Leadership Academy Model

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# Literature Review of Mentoring Relationships

- Research within higher education has identified a number of positive outcomes from mentoring relationships, including:
  - Ability to overcome challenges (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000),
  - Academic success (Bettinger & Baker, 2011),
  - College persistence (Bettinger & Baker, 2011),
  - Professional skill attainment (Dunn & Moody, 1995), and
  - Satisfaction with postsecondary experience (Wallace et al., 2000).

- Although research exploring what structure(s) lead to an effective mentoring relationship is scarce; two emerging themes have been identified:
  - High personal commitment/engagement (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Raggins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000) and
  - A mutually respectful relationship (Dunn & Moody, 1995; Reiss, 2007; Wallace et al., 2000).

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# Research Objective

Our research objective was to identify characteristics of mentoring interactions that resulted in effective relationships and high personal engagement on the part of the student.

# Methods

- <u>Data Collection</u>: one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted with 18 participants in the Leadership Academy.
  - Example Questions: What did you learn through interaction with your mentor? What benefits and challenges did you have with the mentor relationship?

- <u>Data Analysis</u>:  initial inductive analysis of participants' interviews. Follow-up analysis for common themes  and distinguishing characteristics among the mentoring relationships.

- We make no attempt to generalize our findings beyond the participants in this study.

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# Introduction to Findings:
# Types of Mentoring Relationships

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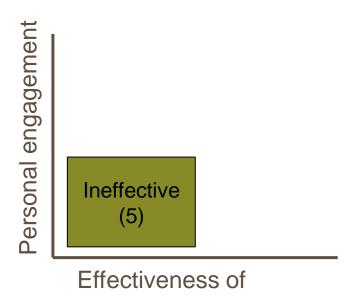UNIVERSITY

# Findings: <u>Ineffective Mentoring Relationships</u>

**Characteristics of an ineffective mentoring relationship:**

- Low engagement, low relationship

- Lacking rapport and professional connection

- An obligation rather than learning experience

- Irregular and infrequent contact

- Missed opportunities

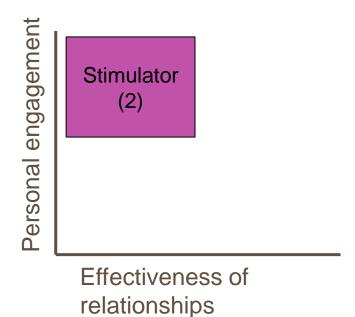# Findings: <u>Ineffective Mentoring Relationships</u>

**What students said:**

- "I didn't utilize him as much as I should have, just because I didn't want to bother him"  -Rebecca

- "We didn't have a set schedule of meetings … we decided it would work better if we just met when we needed to."  -Haley

- "I just think that the communication wasn't there, and I really, I'm sad about that, because I love to talk to people and learn from them."  -Hilary

- "It's just like okay, I do really have to do this, and I do really have to talk with her."  -Lisa

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# Findings: <u>Stimulator Mentoring Relationships</u>

**Characteristics of a stimulator mentoring relationship:**

- High engagement, low relationship

- Identification of areas for growth

- Focus on skill development

- Value in learning from mentor

- Lack of personal connection and openness

Personal engagement

Stimulator (2)

Effectiveness of relationships

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# Findings: <u>Stimulator Mentoring Relationships</u>
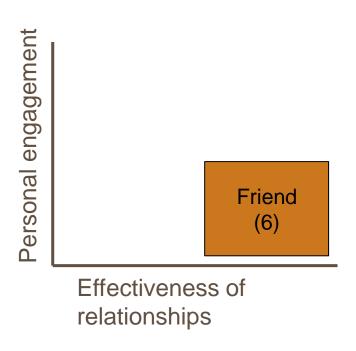
**What students said:**

- "I really do need to work on those skills and then he helped me out, work on those all year." -Peter

- "The challenge, I think one of the challenges was kind of building a more personal relationship." -Peter

- "Some other things that I learned from her, we worked a lot on communication." -Laurie

- "I wasn't able to open up maybe as much as I wanted to because, just because of that background and history with her." -Laurie

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# Findings: <u>Friend Mentoring Relationships</u>

**Characteristics of a friend mentoring relationship:**

- Low engagement, high relationship

- Irregular meetings

- Lack of focus on skill development

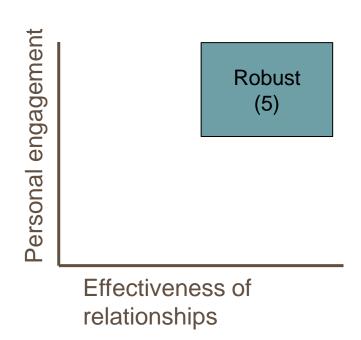- Positive, relaxed conversations

- Good rapport

# Findings: <u>Friend Mentoring Relationships</u>

**What students said:**

- "I mean, I had such a good relationship with him, it was like, you know, one-on-one with a friend."  -Doug

- "Again, we had a really personable relationship; he is a really easy guy to get along with."  -Amanda

- "He was very open to talk about almost anything, so I felt really comfortable coming to him with different ideas, knowing that he was able to be a sounding board."  -James

- "I had a really busy schedule this year, but he was always willing to meet and visit."  -Frank

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# Findings: <u>Robust Mentoring Relationships</u>

**Characteristics of a robust mentoring relationship:**

- High engagement, high relationship

- Good rapport, encouragement

- Challenges to grow coupled with support when needed

- Skill development as well as friendly relationship

Personal engagement

Robust
(5)

Effectiveness of relationships

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# Findings: <u>Robust Mentoring Relationships</u>

**What students said:**

- "She just always had my back no matter what, and she would push me really hard but would also be there to support me in case I tripped." -Elyse

- "He was a good friend, he was a good motivator, um, he's a good role model for me." -Vanessa

- "And he gave me good tips that I could use in pretty much any situation." -Martha

- "The benefits of the mentoring relationship are endless. I think there are some that I still don't know about, and I don't think it's going to end." -Elyse

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# Conclusions

- Robust mentoring relationships require both personal engagement (e.g. investment of time, energy, and commitment) and a personal connection between mentor and mentee.

- Mentoring relationships lacking either personal investment and/or relationships will not yield the optimum outcome for the mentor and mentee.

- The method and model we utilized was useful for analyzing the efficacy of mentoring relationships in a leadership development setting.

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# Recommendations

- Mentors should be encouraged to spend initial time and energy building a personal connection with students. If a trusting relationship is built, mentors should utilize that relationship to offer insight, guidance, and recommendations for student leadership growth.

- Mentees should be empowered to professionally engage in a mentoring relationship through education on the importance of investing time in meeting preparation and maintaining a high standard of professionalism throughout the mentoring relationship.

- Program administrators should consider a trial period for mentoring partnerships so mentors/mentees who do not build a trusting relationship can be reassigned.

- Additional research utilizing our model of mentoring relationships within different contexts and programs is encouraged.

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# Thank you!

# Questions?

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