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To cite this article: Omar D. Torrens, Cristobal Salinas Jr. & Deborah L. Floyd (2017) Examining the value of mentoring and men of color staff members of a community college, *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 25:5, 509-527, DOI: [10.1080/13611267.2017.1415830](https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2017.1415830)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2017.1415830>



Published online: 15 Dec 2017.



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## Examining the value of mentoring and men of color staff members of a community college

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### ABSTRACT

As higher education continues to experience a shift in demographics commiserate with the United States population, colleges and universities are making more concerted efforts to recruit men of color as staff, administrators, and faculty to reflect their diversified student bodies. One way to retain men of color staff members is to provide mentoring programs. While there are authors who are examining the benefits of mentoring, there has been little research into how men of color staff members of community college experience mentoring as a mentee and as a mentor. In this study we sought to understand how do men of color experience mentoring, both as mentor to undergraduate men of color and as staff mentees at a community college. The findings of our study include three common themes: investments made by mentors, investing in mentees, and support from administration.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

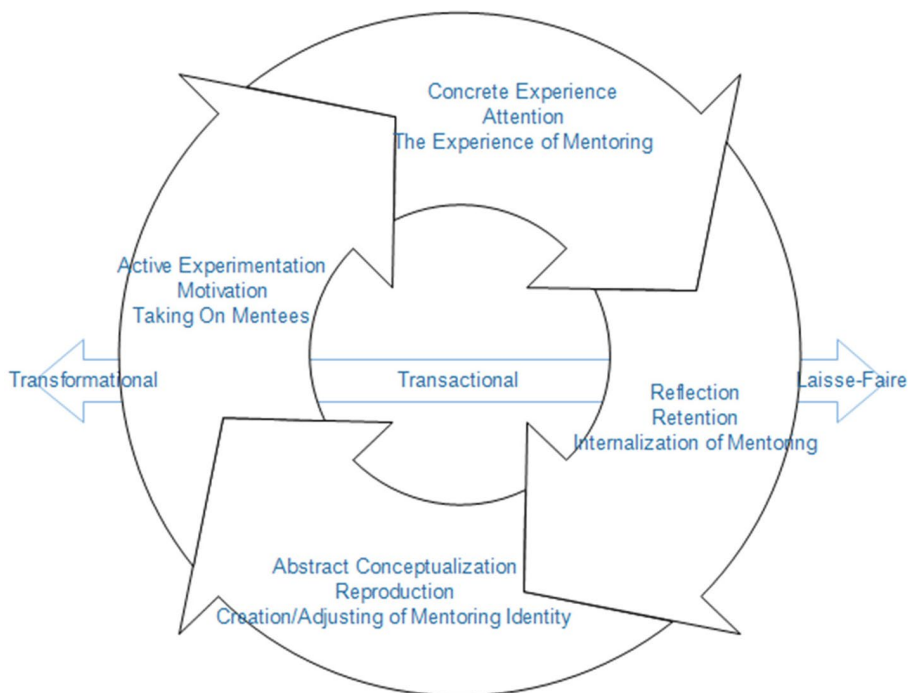
Received 30 January 2017  
Accepted 5 July 2017

### KEYWORDS

Men of color; mentors; mentee; community colleges

## Introduction

Mentoring has been a form of guidance and professional development for centuries. As with many complex relationships, there are several ways to define mentoring. For the purpose of this study, we defined mentoring as a dyadic relationship where a senior member (mentor) guides a junior member (mentee) through formal and informal professional development experiences to help expand professional, psychosocial (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004), political (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007), academic (Ensher & Murphy, 1997) and resource-gathering skills (Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Savage, Karp, & Logue, 2002). While there is a growing body of literature review examining the benefits of mentoring, and extensive research on the definition of mentorship, there has been limited research that explores how men of color (MOC) staff members experience mentoring as mentees and as mentors at a community colleges. Harris and Wood (2013) stated that research on understanding MOC's success in higher education 'has prioritized



**Figure 1.** Kolb's experiential learning model, Bandura's social learning theory model and Bass's leadership continuum.

MOC at four-year institutions, leaving many un-answered questions about those who attend [and work at] community colleges, which is where most MOC who participate in postsecondary education' (p. 174). This suggests that there is the need for future research studies on MOC who work at community colleges.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how MOC experience mentoring, both as mentor to undergraduate students and as staff mentees at a community college.<sup>1</sup> We consider that our findings contribute to various areas of research, examining the experiences of three MOC staff members at a community college. Our study is part of a larger study from which we interviewed 12 MOC students and three staff members from a community college located in southeastern Florida. While conducting our study, we interviewed MOC undergraduate students and staff to understand the experience of mentoring from both sides of the relationship (mentee/mentor). First, in our study we reported how MOC students perceive the staff as their mentors. Second, we reported how MOC staff understand and experience mentorship. Specific attention is given to understanding the transformational nature of mentorship, the value in mentoring MOC, how community colleges can support mentoring for MOC, and provide suggestions for best practices and future research. Next, in our paper we offer a review of the importance of mentorship literature review, and provide an overview of the various definition for mentorship.

## The importance of mentoring

Mentoring is important for personal, emotional, and professional development. Many institutions across the United States utilize some form of mentoring to help newer faculty members weave themselves into the fabric of the colleges and universities (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Savage et al., 2002; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007), gain a greater sense of identity within the academic culture (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001) and provide academic networking opportunities (Turner, González, & Wood, 2008); however, there is a lack of literature examining how higher education institutions facilitate development of MOC staff members at the community college level. Furthermore, researchers suggest that faculty members with mentors report higher levels of organizational visibility (Ellis & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2010), promotions (Mooney, 2010), compensation (Savage et al., 2002), job satisfaction (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004), sense of belonging as well as lower rates of organizational conflict (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Girves, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2005), turnover (Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Scandura & Williams, 2004), tokenism and marginalization (Hansman, 2002; Turner et al., 2008); yet the need for research into staff members persist. This is especially true for MOC staff members at a community college that mentor other MOC students.

The benefits for mentors themselves as mentoring relationships are a two-way street; they can be as transformational for the mentor as they are for the mentee (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Scandura & Williams, 2004). As mentors take on mentees, they increase their visibility amongst institutional stakeholders (Ellis & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2010), expand their supportive reach (Savage et al., 2002; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007), influence the next generation of students and learn from their mentees (Girves et al., 2005; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Scandura & Williams, 2004). Based on the lack of literature reviews where researchers examine the experiences of mentorship for MOC staff members at community colleges, our study contributes to understanding how MOC staff members value mentorship.

Researchers suggest that community colleges with more faculty and staff of color have positive impacts on campus climate (Biggs, Torres, & Washington, 1998), student engagement (Castle, 1993), and student completion rates (Crosson, 1992; Opp, 2002; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). Nationally, recruitment and retention of faculty and staff members of color is generally influenced by the legal landscape shaped by cases regarding affirmative action, discriminatory hiring policies and the communities these institutions are a part of (Turner et al., 2008). Faculty and staff of color across the United States report negative experiences relating to tokenism (Savage et al., 2002), lack of departmental/administrative support, lack of campus/faculty diversity (Trower & Chait, 2002), accent discrimination and salary inequities amongst others (Turner et al., 2008). To help alleviate these negative stressors, many colleges and universities should develop mentoring initiatives to provide more support and intentional professional development for staff members. While these mentoring initiatives are a step in the right direction, more research needs to

be conducted on who mentors the mentor. In parallel, we conducted our research study to understand how MOC experience mentoring, both as mentor to MOC undergraduate students and as staff mentees at a community college.

The demographics of students enrolling in higher education continue to reflect a change in the greater United States population. As more students of color enter college campuses, some seek help as they navigate their way through the college experience (Harris & Wood, 2013; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). To assist in this journey, various higher education institutions aim towards diversity and peer-mentoring initiatives to provide support and guidance to these growing student populations. The relationships that develop during mentor/mentee interactions have been linked to positive outcomes such as student engagement, retention, graduation and overall student satisfaction (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Harris, 1999; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). If one considers the law of supply and demand in this context, as the supply of students of color continues to grow, the need and value of staff members of color increases proportionally. Various scholars have noted that staff members of color on college and universities have a positive effect on both student and faculty recruitment and retention (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Evans & Cokley, 2008; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Trower & Chait, 2002). If college and universities are to serve a diverse student demographic, they must critically examine the initiatives in place to help support MOC staff members.

### *Defining mentorship*

There are many definitions throughout the literature that define mentorship and how to measure the quality of mentoring relationships. Through the literature review we defined mentoring as a dyadic relationship where a senior member (mentor) guides a junior member (mentee) through formal and informal professional development experiences to help expand professional, psychosocial (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004), political (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007), academic (Ensher & Murphy, 1997) and resource-gathering skills (Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Savage et al., 2002).

Other scholars have studied how the effects of race, gender, perceived similarity and contact influenced the quality and effectiveness of mentoring (Ensher & Murphy, 1997). They noted that:

the degree of similarity between the mentor and the [mentee] either actual or perceived, could affect the quality of the mentoring relationship ... [and this] phenomenon is explained by the similarity attraction paradigm [as cited in Byrne, 1971], which suggests that the more similar one perceives another person to be, the more that other person is liked. (p. 463–464)

Ensher and Murphy (1997) noted that perceived similarity and contact between mentor and mentee pairs had far more of an impact on overall satisfaction than actual same-race pairings with little contact. Considering these findings,

researchers suggest mentoring networks may be more effective than traditional dyadic mentoring relationships due to the fact that expecting one mentor to meet all the needs of a mentee is no longer realistic (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Savage et al., 2002; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). A paradigm shift involves mentees seeking out multiple mentors for specific development goals based on the mentors' expertise, availability, support, and communication style. By engaging in multiple mentoring, mentees expand their network of mentors, set clear expectations with regards to skill acquisition in the mentor's field of expertise, and lessen the time commitments of all mentors individually while increasing time spent with all mentors collectively (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Savage et al., 2002; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007).

While research on staff development and mentoring continues to expand, it is evident that a gap in scholarship exists on understanding of mentoring staff members of color is still in its early stages of infancy. There are several reasons indicated that may account for this gap in knowledge. Higher education exists in a special space when it comes to supervision, organizational hierarchy and the separation of management (administration/staff) and labor (faculty). de Janasz and Sullivan (2004) pointed to traditional business environments where the employees and managers may have wide had variations in education, experience, and responsibilities. However, in higher education settings, faculty of different ranks generally have comparatively similar levels of education, experience, and responsibilities. Administrators and staff in higher education institutions may have been professors themselves who have changed gears and opted to manage other academic units along with taking on extra responsibilities. With these similarities evident throughout the academic culture, the apparent need for mentoring is not as visible as it would be in traditional business settings (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Ragins, 1997).

## Theoretical frameworks

To conceptualize the balance of administrative support and the transformational nature of mentoring relationships, we combined Bass's (1985) leadership continuum from Transformational to Laissez-Faire leadership. This is to illustrate the level of support provided by administration and a combination of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984) as well as Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) to represent a mentoring process (see Figure 1). Researchers posit that mentoring is a two-part process that is both experiential and social in nature (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Scandura & Williams, 2004), hence the combination of both Kolb (1984) and Bandura (1977) helps explain how mentoring behaviors are learned, modeled, and replicated. Additionally, resources allocated at institutions indicate the level of commitment shown by administration towards reaching staff development goals (Evans & Cokley, 2008; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Mooney, 2010; Osland, Kolb, Rubin, & Turner, 2007).

The integration model, illustrated in Figure 1, reflects both Kolb's (1984) experiential theory and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory in relation to the

mentoring process. Kolb's (1984) experiential theory illustrates learning through the following stages: (a) concrete experience, (b) reflection, (c) abstract conceptualization, and (d) active experimentation. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory discusses learning occurring through (a) attention, (b) retention, (c) reproduction, and (d) motivation.

### **Purpose of our study and research questions**

The purpose of our phenomenological study was to understand how MOC experience mentoring, both as mentor to undergraduate men of color and as staff mentees at a community college. We aimed to discover and understand three things: the transformational nature of mentorship; the value in mentoring men of color; and, how administration can support mentoring men of color. In their research, scholars indicated a need to continue exploring how MOC staff members experience mentorship and how the intersection of race and ethnicity affects mentorship within the context of the community college (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Hansman, 2002; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007; Turner et al., 2008).

In our phenomenological study, we attempted to fill the gap in research on MOC staff members in community colleges as it relates to both sides of the mentoring relationship, mentor to MOC undergraduate students as well as MOC mentee of administration. This leads to an understanding of how they perceive administrative support for mentoring initiatives. As such, the following research questions guided our study:

- (1) What are the lived experiences of men of color staff members employed at a community college as it relates to mentor/mentee relationships?
- (2) How do men of color staff members employed at a community college perceive their administration's support in their efforts to mentor men of color?

### **Methods**

Our qualitative study is phenomenological in nature to capture the essence of what mentorship is for MOC in a community college. Creswell (2013) described phenomenology as a process where the researchers describe the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants. To understand the lived experiences and the phenomenon of mentorship described by the participants, we conducted focus group interviews of MOC at a community college. Mentoring is a very complex relationship and the sheer amount of research conducted on the experience of mentoring attest to the amount of variation that accompanies each individual relationship. Attempting to understand the nature and complexity lends itself well to phenomenological studies (Bogdan & Biklen,

2007; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The participants in our study were transformed by the experience of someone taking a vested interest in their education and mentoring them.

The study is part of a larger study from which we conducted focus group interviews with 12 MOC undergraduate students and three MOC staff members at a community college. This study was conducted in 2016, at a community college in southeastern Florida. For purposes of our study, we aim to understand how MOC experience mentoring, both as mentors to undergraduate men of color and as staff mentees at a community college. As we sought to understand mentorship from both sides of the relationship (mentee/mentor), we reported data on both MOC undergraduate students and MOC staff members at a community college. First, we reported how MOC students perceive the MOC staff as their mentors. Second, we reported how MOC staff understand and experience mentorship.

The staff members and advisors were men of color, they advised men of color students' groups, and assisted to facilitate their meetings. At the beginning of one meeting, all students, staff members and advisors in attendance were asked if they would like to participate in our research study, and were provided a consent form. All participants self-identified as men of color. Only 12 out of the 18 students, and three out of the six male staff members chose to participate in our study. The students were divided into three different focus groups, and the staff members in one focus group. Each focus group was 60 min long, and they were conducted in a private classroom in a community college. During the focus groups participants were asked questions with regards their understandings and experiences with leadership development, mentorship, self-awareness, community involvement, academic and career pathways in the community college. All interviews were audio recorded for transcription and accuracy by the researchers. All transcripts were analyzed, coded for themes, and member checked for validity (Creswell, 2013). From the data collected, it was evident that mentorship is important to the success of these MOC.

### *Setting and participants*

All the MOC staff members in our study volunteer to serve as mentors for a student organization that aims to support MOC students by creating a sense of community, accountability and academic advancement. The community college has several satellite campuses throughout several counties in the state of Florida and each campus has its respective MOC student group and staff advisor to help facilitate the weekly or bi-weekly meetings. Once a month the satellite campuses choose a location to hold a grand meeting with each campus represented by their group and staff advisor. These meetings serve as a way for students and staff members from the different campuses to share ideas, best practices, and support one another.

As stated earlier, our study is part of an ongoing study that sought to understand leadership development, mentorship, self-awareness, community involvement,

academic and career success for MOC at a community college. As part of the larger study, 12 male students participated in three focus groups while the three staff members participated in a separate focus group. All 12 student participants were earning their associates degree at the community college with aspirations to transfer to a four-year university to earn their bachelor's degree. Students' associate degree aspirations included criminal justice and business. Students' ages range from 19 to 39 years old. To protect the identity of all participants of this study we have given them pseudonyms. The four community college student participants quoted in this study are Jason, Marc, Shaun, and Carlos.

The three staff member participants work at the community college and hold entry level positions. Each participant holds staff/administrative responsibilities within their units. In addition, each of these individuals serves as the volunteer staff advisor to their respective MOC student group for their respective satellite campuses. All three staff member participants did not receive salary increases, although they were appointed to serve as the advisor for the MOC student group by the Vice-President of Student Affairs of the community college. To protect the identity of participants of our study we have given them pseudonyms. The three staff member participants are Raul, self-identified as a Latino, and serves as an Academic Advisor; Frank, self-identified as an African-American, and serves as a Student Activity Manager; and, Edward, self-identified as an African-American and serves as a Student Loan Coordinator. In the next section, we present the findings of our study.

## Findings

The findings of our study are presented in two parts. First, we provide a summary of how the participating MOC students see Raul, Frank, and Edward as their mentors. Then we present the results of the three MOC staff members. Throughout our research study, three common themes emerged: investments made by mentors, investing in mentees, and support from administration. The notion of *paying it forward* and *pulling others along* by the staff participants indicated a debt that was felt on behalf of the one-time mentees and this debt was paid by helping those that came after. We find that the three MOC staff members experienced a transformation in two stages throughout their academic careers: being mentored and then mentoring others.

### *Mentees redefining mentorship*

During the student focus groups, all students were asked about their perceptions and understandings of leadership development, mentorship, self-awareness, community involvement, academic and career success. All students were asked if they had any mentors, and to describe them. When students responded to this question they did not use the term mentor; instead they used the term 'role model.' Shaun

stated that he had no mentors or role models before he enrolled at his community college.

What made me decide to go to college was the fact that everyone in my community is like not the exact role models that you could look up to and we didn't really have any [educated people] in my neighborhood. So, the fact that we can acquire knowledge if we just reach out for it, is the reason why I wanted to go for it. The reason why I did choose to come to college was because the fact that we did not have role models and mentors ... that were telling us 'go to college, go get a higher education, go out do what you need to do while you're still young.'

Like Shaun, all other students stated that they did not have mentors or role model before enrolling at their community college. This reason prompted them to enroll at their hometown community college with the goal to be a mentor and role model for other members of their community. Jason said, 'I decided to go back so I can be a role model.' Carlos shared that he got an education because his parents did not have the opportunity and he wanted to enter college be a 'hero' and role model for other people. He noted:

They didn't have the opportunity I have, then after I finished high school I was like 'What do I do now?' I finished what I had to do and quickly I went into college. I didn't want to rest and get lazy, quickly I wanted to enter college and I didn't know what I wanted to do really, then I started searching. It took me awhile to search and found that I really wanted to do to be like a hero, a role model to people.

From the focus groups, we learned that the students found a support system through the men of color student groups. They have had the opportunity to develop their leadership skills, and to find mentors that look and sound like them (other MOC). All three staff members, Raul, Frank, and Edward have developed mentoring relationship with all students. Mark referred to Edward as his mentor and his relationship has been a learning opportunity. Mark said,

[Edward] is one of them [mentors] ... Watching him inspires me. To become a mentor for myself and a leader to others. Its everything that he does, the way that he treats us. He makes sure we eat, he checks up on us and stuff like that. See if our grades are good. We talk about stuff. We talk to each other. I feel like the relationship he has with us, I feel like we are helping him as well. Because we push him too. And that's where we learn leadership.

From the focus group interviews, it is evident that the students see Raul, Frank, and Edward as their mentors, although they interchangeably use the term role models. The students felt as if the staff members care and invest time and energy on MOC students. For purposes and validity of our study, it is important to point out that Jason, Marc, Shaun, and Carlos (the students/mentees) call Raul, Frank, and Edward their mentors throughout their community college career. Yet, other students also referred to their parents as additional role models and who motivated them to continue with their education career aspirations.

Our findings support that students (mentees) found similarities among their mentors, and that they are more engaged in the process, more committed to outcomes, and tend to take more ownership of their role in the relationship of

mentoring. Furthermore, researchers explore how webs of multiple mentors can provide extra support and networking opportunities which are vital to career success. Having multiple mentors gives mentees more opportunities to find similarities with their mentors and these students have an opportunity every month during the large meetings to expand their network of mentors. Next, our results from the focus group of the MOC staff members illustrate the importance of mentoring throughout their educational career.

### *Investments by mentors*

One of these transformational points for Raul, Frank, and Edward, who were MOC staff members, was during their adolescence when an older adult took a vested interest in their education. Raul mentioned that:

coming from a very modest background ... we were poor, government assistance all that kind of stuff, so for me ... having key individuals along the way [that mentored me] was the catalyst for me realizing that it was now my turn to pay it forward as well.

Frank also mentioned a sense of community that in his day was common, but now not so much. He stated that he comes from 'a generation that is a little older than you guys ... [it] was about black power and unity ... I guess I don't see it as much or at least its' not at the same level.' Frank went on to say:

someone helped me, and it's my way of giving back ... my life wasn't necessarily all roses coming up and ... [my mentors] helped me through some rough times and gave me some guidance ... I think it's just an obligation to give back.

Each of the MOC felt that sense of obligation to their communities after receiving help, guidance, and mentoring. They mentioned a desire to help others along their educational journey and connect them to positive outcomes. Having mentors invest in them provided a sense of value and success which encouraged them to continue furthering their education. Having this sense of success provided a model for them to then help others achieve their own sense of success. This is where mentoring begets mentoring. Frank made the point that 'a lot of success had to do with you internally feeling that you are somebody ... before that I didn't really have a sense.' Edward stated that he considers success to be 'never forgetting where you come from and knowing that once you made it, you went back and ... brought somebody else up.' Raul gave the example:

Success is like a ten-story building. For most of us [MOC], we're starting at the basement so when we get to the first or second floor we're like – *we made it!* But the more I grow the more I get exposed to new forms of success the more I want to grow ... if I can get [the students of color he works with] to understand that there is more than just starting at the basement and getting to the second floor ... eventually we [MCO] will be at the penthouse.

These participants experienced the transformational power of mentoring and soon felt obligation to help future generations of students. Now having a model

of what mentoring is and the impact it had on their lives, the participants began to take on mentees.

### *Investing in mentees*

Edward told the story of his first encounter participating in a mentoring group and the joy that came along with feeling as if he were changing lives. Edward stated the he enjoys working and mentoring people:

I just get an extreme pleasure out of being able to help students and staff ... to reach any goals they may or might be trying to obtain and so, the need and fulfillment of wanting to help is what got me involved [to mentor them].

Raul described how being a mentor has made him more selfless and in his role as an academic advisor has employed appreciative advising to help students navigate college. Raul continued to say, 'I think there is a difference between being a really great mentor and offering some really good feedback as compared to sort of telling people what to do.' By providing feedback, guidance and understanding, Raul felt he has gained a new sense of humility when it comes to mentoring because he has reflected on the way his mentors behaved. He stated 'it forces you to be a little more considerate, a little more selfless, a little more understanding.' Similar to Raul, Frank noted that mentoring helps keep him young and in tune with students and society. Frank stated:

I joke with students about cell phones. I just got rid of my flip phone a while back. Everybody laughing at me and most don't know what they are, but it's the little things like that in terms of keeping up with what's going on in society.

He continued by saying, 'we living in a society where we have four of five different generations and how do you interact with everybody? Only way *is* by interacting and mentoring them [younger generation of students]' (*italics for emphasis*).

When we asked how they defined success for MOC students, they all mentioned that often success for people of color is 'surviving and navigating college' and 'graduating' with a college degree, as this can create more opportunities for students, families, and other people of color. Edward noted 'graduation and in big bold [letters] – law abiding citizen. Being a productive member of society. That's what I consider success.' Raul stated that his philosophy to success revolves three pillars: 'exposure, access, and support'. As a mentor, he aimed to:

expose them [his mentees] to [leadership] opportunities, show them how to access it – just because they know about it doesn't mean they know how to get there and then support them through [college], help them take advantage of their strengths.

As the participants made investments in the next generation of mentees, they pointed to institutional support efforts, or the lack thereof. For example, Raul shared that he receives his mentorship from his peers, such as Edward and Frank:

My validation comes from the light bulb moments and those great conversation that I have with individual in this group setting [Edward and Frank]. I don't ever expect

validation [and mentorship] to come from campus community ... and I certainly don't expect it to come from administration.

Raul, Frank, and Edward believed that their institutions and administrators should create more support and mentorship opportunities for them, as they have created those mentorship experiences for other MOC students. In the next finding, we discuss more the need to create mentorship support for MOC staff members.

### **Support from administration**

Although many colleges and universities across the nation support diversity initiatives regarding recruitment and retention for faculty of color, students of color, and sometimes staff of color, Raul, Frank, and Edward did not feel as if their efforts are validated by the administration of the community college. Raul made note that:

When you look at diversity initiatives, multicultural initiatives ... at ways to make change at the institutional level ... I think the college or university is looking for a checklist of things that they can check off, rather than focusing in providing the support [mentoring] we need.

Raul went on to state that he is usually the driving force behind diversity initiatives as opposed to the institution itself. 'This is the kind of stuff that occupies my mind on a very regular basis, more than it probably should ... I just wish it occupied the minds of top tier administration the same way.' Edward chimes in stating that:

The college knows there is a need for it [mentoring], but we are not provided the support we need to make it [the community college] more successful. Administration talks about taking it to the next level, but in terms of [mentorship and] dollars and cents, [we] are just not getting the support ... We talk about it a lot, we know there is a need for it, but I just feel we don't get the support we need.

Frank had experience working at several institutions. He took a minute to himself before responding to the lack of support from the administration:

If the money (budgetary support) isn't coming off the top then I have always questioned how valued the institution thinks of [the initiative or program]. If you don't have the money, then you have to give personnel or space. We have taken this [MOC student group] mission because we believe it's a mission of mentoring and love, but you can only do so much when you don't have [the resources].

From the perspectives of these staff members, administrative support could go a long way in terms of helping their mentoring efforts. Without budgetary commitments, it sends a signal to these staff members that will have to fend for themselves when it comes to operating the mentoring initiative.

### **Connecting the findings to theory**

In this section, we connect the findings to the theoretical frameworks presented earlier. As illustrated in Figure 1, both Kolb's (1984) experiential theory and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory represent a mentoring process. A mentoring process

is both experiential and social in nature and the findings of this study support the combination of Kolb's (1984) and Bandura's (1997) learning models. This new conceptual framework creates four phases to understand mentorship for MOC staff members. The first phase of this integrative model occurs when concrete experience and attention meet. For the participants of our study, this phase occurred when someone took a vested interest in their education and provided mentoring. As they experienced quality mentoring, they began to model behaviors of their mentor in an attempt to develop professionally, academically, and psychosocially.

The second phase of the integrative model is reflection and retention. This varied between the participants as some reflected immediately on their mentoring experience while others took longer to reflect. For example, Frank graduated high school and was drafted into the military during Vietnam, which caused his reflection phase to last a longer than Raul or Edward. After reflecting on their own experiences, Frank, Raul, and Edward decided to become mentors to others MOC.

The third phase in the integrative model occurred when abstract conceptualization and reproduction met and they took on mentees. Kolb (1984) made note that reflection leads to a new idea or modification of an existing abstract concept. The participants reflected on how mentoring impacted their lives and begin to create their own mentoring identity.

This leads to the fourth phase: active experimentation and motivation. Kolb (1984) identified active experimentation as the phase where the new abstract concept (mentoring) is applied to the real world to see what results. As these MOC staff members became mentors and mentored other MOC undergraduate students, they adjusted their mentoring identity by incorporating reinforcement or punishment from previous mentoring experiences. Bandura's (1977) motivation stated that new learned behaviors must be important to be reproduced. As the findings suggest, these participants felt that giving back to their communities was of the utmost importance.

Based on their lived experiences and self-reflection, Frank, Raul, and Edward agreed that they are now in the position to share their life experiences with the next generation of mentees in an attempt to make good on *paying it forward*. If the mentoring relationship has clearly defined goals and expectations, the ability to assess progress towards these goals is enhanced (Brown, 2009; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Jacobi, 1991; Noy & Ray, 2012). This also helps motivate the mentor if they receive reinforcement to *pull others along* with them in a continuous feedback loop.

This integrative model consists of four developmental stages experienced by mentees and mentors that lay overtop the administrative leadership continuum. As participants moved through the stages outlined in Figure 1, the support from administration plays a critical role in professional development. When administration is aligned with the transformational end of the spectrum, mentors have more resources at their disposal such as funding, personnel, and locations to hold meetings. This allocation of resources has an enormous impact when it comes

to staff morale, job satisfaction and appreciation of administration (Hansman, 2002; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Savage et al., 2002; Scandura & Williams, 2004). Transformational leadership affects followers by '(a) raising followers' level of consciousness about the importance and value of ... goals, (b) getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team ... and (c) moving followers to address higher-level needs' (Northouse, 2016, p. 166).

In contrast, Laissez-Faire leadership 'represents the absence of leadership ... [administration] abdicates responsibility, delays decisions, gives no feedback, and makes little effort to help followers satisfy their needs. There is no exchange with followers or attempt to help them grow' (Northouse, 2016, p. 172). This can have severe negative impacts on staff members and their sense of self-worth in the eyes of administration (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Girves et al., 2005; Hansman, 2002; Harris, 1999; Thomas, 2001).

Like any other study, there are a few limitations. This integrative model on the process of mentoring is in its infancy and more research is needed discover how other MOC staff members view mentorship. The sample size for our study was small and therefore not generalizable to other MOC staff member experiences. One cannot assume that every MOC staff member experiences mentorship the same way. More research needs to be conducted to understand how other MOC staff members at community colleges substantiate the notion of mentorships, *paying it forward* and *pulling other along*. Additionally, the model does not account for the socialization of staff members in academe. As stated earlier, the socialization process is a major part of mentorship within the academy and further research could begin to illuminate how the intersection of these forces affect one another. Last, since most of the scholarship that focus on mentorship implies assumptions that race and ethnicity identification is deem as White, because White faculty and staff members have dominated higher education (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001), we need more research that explores how other race and ethnicity groups experience mentorship.

## Discussion and suggestions

If administration wishes to develop MOC staff members, there are a plethora of programs that could aide in this endeavor. Throughout our study, a few key points that may aide in mentoring MOC staff members are as follows:

### *Leadership involvement*

University leadership should embrace and promote mentoring throughout all levels of the institution. The value of mentoring should also be made apparent to all stakeholders involved with leadership taking an active role in mentoring initiatives (Ragins, 1997; Savage et al., 2002; Scandura & Williams, 2004).

### ***Facilitation and implementation***

Special events and seminars throughout the year provide opportunities for structured networking events amongst both students and staff members. Dedicated space to for mentoring activities to be held should be scheduled as well as documentation of best practices to be shared amongst staff. Regular contact should be encouraged and incentivized (Ellis & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2010; Evans & Cokley, 2008; Girves et al., 2005; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Tuit, 2010).

### ***Setting expectations for the mentoring relationship***

Mentors and mentees should set clear expectations with regards to length of the relationship, contact schedule, areas of focus, goals for the mentee, and pathways to achieve the goals (Brown, 2009; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007; Thomas, 2001).

### ***Strategic planning and finances***

Mentoring initiatives should be reflected in the strategic plan. Funding the infrastructure to aide in the adoption of mentoring programs will also illustrate administration's commitment to mentoring (Ellis & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2010; Mooney, 2010; Osland et al., 2007).

### ***Assessment and support***

Ongoing and continuous assessment should be practiced with special attention paid to goals and outcomes outlined by mentors and mentees. Wake Forest's Mentoring Resource Center and University of Hawaii have excellent mentoring programs and offer advice on how to create, assess, and maintain mentoring programs across different departments (Hansman, 2002; Harris, 1999; Jacobi, 1991; Noy & Ray, 2012).

### ***Future research***

Although mentoring continues to draw attention from scholars, there are several areas that warrant additional research. Within the model proposed, the reflection phase may vary immensely between mentees. Why do some individuals reflect immediately and others take time to reflect on their mentoring experience? Additionally, are there any differences when it comes to outcomes of mentoring between White staff members and MOC staff members? Trends of engagement based on race and ethnicity in higher education should be explored. Another suggestion for future research lies in cross-race, cross-culture mentoring initiatives. Would White mentees being mentored by staff members of color also feel the

need to *pay it forward* and *pull others along*? Additionally, if mentoring is a reciprocal relationship would mentees of color influence White mentors with regards to understanding diversity, academic inclusion, and power structures? Last, there is the need of more empirical research that seeks to understand the experiences of MOC staff members at community colleges.

## Conclusion

The participants in our study expressed an extreme desire to want to help other MOC navigate through the college experience. They intimated that most of the students they mentor are first-generation, first time in college, and need support in order to be successful. When asked what motivated them to get into education, the resounding answer was that someone invested time and energy in them which in turn became a catalyst for them wanting to help others. This notion of *paying it forward* and *pulling others along* continued to permeate throughout the interview and each of the participants felt an obligation not only be successful, but also defined success as helping those that come after. This sense of community activism and shared success is one that also warrants more study.

While the college expresses a desire to recruit and retain students and staff members of color, by not supporting the mentoring initiatives, participants question the validity of those sentiments. Participants in our study made mention of lip service being paid to mentoring initiatives and of the administration being able to check a box in order to say they are at least trying. This lackluster support has had some negative repercussions on the participants in the form of excess stress due to lack of material support, lack of mentors to continue developing professionally, and lack of support to cope with the issues facing their mentees. This indicates that the institution currently falls towards the *laissez-faire* end of the integrative model which inhibits the participants from further developing their mentoring capabilities. Staff participants noted that there have been instances where student mentees were attending classes, but these students were homeless and/or did not have anything to eat due to a lack of resources. This stress kept two of the staff participants up on edge and left them feeling helpless. Administration should pay attention to the needs of their staff when it comes to coping with these types of issues and be more proactive when it comes to equipping staff members with the tools to help students of color. If the institution moves toward the transformational side of the integrative model, an example of support could come in the form of professional development or increased budgetary considerations for the mentoring initiatives.

As colleges and universities grapple with the change in demographics occurring in the United States, developing staff members that represent these students becomes more important. As discussed earlier, when the supply of students of color grows, the need and value of faculty and staff members of color also increases proportionally. Numerous researchers have indicated that staff members of color

on college campuses have a positive effect on both student and faculty recruitment and retention due to greater representation, diversity and a more inclusive learning environment (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Evans & Cokley, 2008; Hansman, 2002; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Savage et al., 2002; Trower & Chait, 2002; Turner et al., 2008). If institutions are serious about diversity initiatives and retaining staff members of color, they must provide mentoring support to these individuals so they can continue to develop and grow professionally. Additionally, resources must be allocated to mentorship, recruitment, and retaining staff of color initiatives in order to provide personnel, funding, and meeting locations for mentors and mentees alike. Without the support, administrations risk looking disingenuous and fake regarding diversity initiatives and alienating faculty, staff and students of color.

## Note

1. Floyd and Walker (2008) stated that some community colleges are primarily two-year higher education institutions. Many community colleges offer limited numbers of four-year baccalaureate degrees; these institutions may be referred as state colleges. This study took place at a state college that offers four bachelor's degrees, located in southeastern Florida.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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