

## **CARES: Mentoring through University Outreach**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined whether a university outreach program featuring peer mentoring and offering a social support network can impact college-going aspirations. Study participants were middle school students of color and low SES students and their university student mentors. Purposeful selection was used to identify six mentors and six protégés and match them by race/ethnicity. The program involved weekly mentoring sessions and four campus visits. At the end of the CARES project, protégés expressed changes in postsecondary aspirations, attitudes about learning, educational plans, and ability to overcome negative educational socialization. Mentors experienced growth and motivation as a result of working with protégés. The bidirectional nature of the program's impact on mentors and protégés is highlighted.

America's racial and ethnic minorities have been and continue to be grossly underrepresented in higher education and in almost all occupational fields that require a college education. (Attinasi 1989, 247)

### **Introduction**

Urban schools across the United States are experiencing influxes of students of color, yet NCES data show that the underrepresentation noted by Attinasi in 1989 continues to plague higher education, where only 31 percent of students at degree-granting institutions in 2005 were students of color. Additionally, data from the 2004 NCES report, *Contexts of Postsecondary Education* (U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2004), show that students of color are overrepresented in two-year institutions (35%) and underrepresented in four-year institutions (25%). This underrepresentation exists even though communities of color are growing in nearly every part of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). The urban area in which this study was conducted is no exception: Central City's<sup>1</sup> Latino/a population increased 138 percent in the last ten years. With this changing dynamic, there was an expectation that the demographics at Western State University (WSU), located in Central City, would change, yet this is not the case. In the 2005 fall term, 18,142 students enrolled at

WSU: 155 were African American, 632 Hispanic, and 93 Native American. Research suggests one reason students of color remain underrepresented is that they are not systematically afforded opportunities to interact with college students and/or campuses (Grossman and Tierney 1998; GEAR UP 2006). In response to this concern, an outreach program in which WSU student volunteers mentored students attending Hill Middle School, in the Central City School District, was developed. The purpose of the program was to increase the college-going aspirations of middle school students. This study explored the impact of the CARES program in its first year of implementation with the intent of determining whether the program had the potential to meet its goal of increasing college-going aspirations, and developing recommendations for institutionalizing the program.

### **Relevant Literature**

Researchers such as Swail (2000) have advocated for mentoring programs in secondary schools, arguing that the educational system does not provide adequate resources for low-income and at-risk students. National Survey of Outreach Programs survey data show that the three most targeted student populations included in early intervention programs are low-income, minority, and first-generation students (College Board 2000). Two federal programs, TRIO and GEAR UP, include mentoring to encourage students to aspire to postsecondary education, focusing on college attendance and awareness of educational opportunities. TRIO and GEAR UP mentors, like those in the CARES program, provide role modeling, tutoring, and campus visits. TRIO programs serve no more than 10 percent of the eligible student population, and GEAR UP is similarly limited by budget constraints. University-based programs, like CARES, can add to the outreach efforts of federal programs, increasing opportunities for potential college students.

Rhodes, Grossman, and Resch (2000) examined the effects of mentoring on the academic adjustment of adolescents in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. They confirmed that mentoring relationships offer care and support that can challenge negative views adolescents hold of themselves. Hamilton and Hamilton (1990) found that by conveying messages about the value of school and serving as tangible models of success, mentors stimulate protégés' positive attitudes toward school achievement, perceived academic competence, and performance. More recently, DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) noted that youth with mentors were more likely to complete high school and attend college, and DuBois,

Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) noted in their metareview of the mentoring literature that mentors positively impacted protégés' academic and educational aspirations. Through role modeling, emotional support, and positive feedback, mentors influence adolescents' perceptions of identity, self-worth, competence as learners, and the value they place on school.

Several authors focus on the need for consistency and commitment on the part of mentors. Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found in their evaluation of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program that a relationship that extends for at least one year will yield better results for protégés. Duration of the relationship was also a factor in the positive outcomes DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found from mentoring relationships. Rhodes and DuBois (2006) and DuBois and others (2002) noted that programs that outline expectations for structure and support on the part of mentors were more successful than those without guidelines and expectations.

In order to achieve supportive mentoring relationships that build students' trust and provide effective role models for positive personal development, RAISE expects a strong commitment of time and energy from mentors. McPartland and Nettles (1991) evaluated the RAISE model, which focuses on one-on-one mentors for at-risk middle school students. RAISE's strategy is to create a sustained caring connection that makes a difference in children's lives. Study results in five middle schools supported a conclusion that mentoring is an important component of RAISE and found that when mentoring was strongly implemented, a positive effect on improving student attendance was likely. The authors argued that mentoring's positive effect on attendance may impact other academic outcomes, including increased aspirations to enter college.

Research examining the college-going process has recognized that students of color, as well as students from lower socioeconomic status SES households, are less likely to aspire to a college education. Hamrick and Stage (2004) stated:

Despite increasing numbers of minority students in the high school population, their successful transition to four-year colleges remains limited. Part of the reason for these discrepant figures is that minority students, particularly low-income and first-generation students, face obstacles to college attendance. Many attend inner-city schools with low levels of funding, crowded classrooms, or inadequate offerings, under-prepared teachers, and often dangerous conditions. (151–52)

Even promising students who work hard and have the potential to pursue postsecondary education do not appear to receive the support necessary to reach their educational goals. Other factors affect students' aspirations. For example, students may not have peers or family members who have attended college, and opportunities for scholarships, grants, and other financial aid may not be made known to all parents and students. Research supports the use of mentoring to positively impact students with these background characteristics (*DuBois et al. 2002; DuBois and Silverthorn 2005; Langhout, Rhodes, and Osborne 2004; Rhodes and DuBois 2006*).

While there is extensive literature exploring the impact of adult-youth mentoring programs, there is very little that examines the success of youth-youth programs (*Rhodes and DuBois 2006*), and we did not find any research that looked at the impact of involvement in mentoring on the mentors. Given this, we set out to examine the impact that mentors can have by assisting low SES students and students of color in navigating the barriers that can prevent their entrance to and success in higher education institutions and to explore the experiences and impact of the program on the mentors. The research questions framing this study were: Can a mentoring program that offers a social support network to students be an effective tool for increasing college-going aspirations in middle school students? What impact does participating in CARES have on the mentors and their educational experiences?

## **Methods**

### **Research contexts**

Hill Middle School was selected for this pilot study based on three criteria: (1) a large number of low SES students as defined by the Federal Free/Reduced Price Meal Program data (Hill has 92% eligibility); (2) the severity of academic and other concerns at the school; and (3) the size of the English Language Learner (ELL) population. Hill Middle is located in a diverse school district where Latino/as make up more than 50 percent of the population. A high number of low-income students reside in this federally designated Enterprise Zone: 20 percent of the 21,836 families live below the poverty level. WSU is a Master's Comprehensive University with an open-entry admissions policy, serving a student population that is diverse in terms of academic preparation, intent to complete, and career aspirations. CARES was proposed by the coordinator for community service as a means for increasing the representation of students of color whose numbers were increasing locally but

were not matched on campus. The coordinator developed the program and implemented it through her position in the Community Service Center.

### Methodology

To examine CARES' impact on the college aspirations of its middle school participants as well as the experiences of the college student mentors, we employed a case study methodology, which allowed for in-depth examination of the phenomenon (*Patton 2002; Stake 2003*) of the experience of middle school CARES participants and their mentors. The data for this case study were collected during the first academic year that CARES was in operation (2006–2007) and included interviews and observations.

### Participant selection

The participants in the study were six WSU mentors and six Hill Middle School students.

The director of after-school programs used purposeful selection to select the six protégés from Hill Middle School. The following criteria were used to guide the participant selection process: protégés were in seventh or eighth grade in the 2006–2007 school year, would potentially be first-generation college students, and were from low SES backgrounds. Students who met these criteria, and whom the director of after-school programs felt would benefit from the mentoring experience, were invited to participate.

After protégés were identified, purposeful selection was used to identify six WSU mentors within the following selection criteria: traditional and nontraditional students with grade point averages above 2.5, positive references from WSU leadership programs, and the willingness to commit to the program's expectations of mentors. Care was taken to match mentors' race/ethnicity with that of the protégés. Mentors were invited to participate in CARES by the coordinator for community service and attended a training session facilitated by the WSU multicultural counselor, which included discussions about reporting requirements, listening skills, community resources, and the reflection process. Mentors were supervised by the Central City School District's director of after-school programs and WSU's coordinator for community service.

The demographic data of the twelve participants is listed in table 1. Of the protégées, five were students of color and one was white; four were female and two were male. Five of the protégés were in the eighth grade, and one was in ninth. Two mentors were college juniors, two were sophomores, one was a senior, and the

**Table 1. Study Participants**

Participant		Race/ethnicity	Gender	Year in School
Mentor	Joanne	Asian (Japanese)	Female	College Junior
Protégé	Kelly	Asian	Female	8th Grade
Mentor	Irma	Latina	Female	College Junior
Protégé	Kristin	Latina	Female	9th Grade
Mentor	Noel	Latino	Male	College Sophomore
Protégé	Jamal	Latino	Male	8th Grade
Mentor	Jayrod	African American	Male	College Sophomore
Protégé	Chris	African American	Male	8th Grade
Mentor	Karina	Latina	Female	College Freshman
Protégé	Marta	Latina/African American	Female	8th Grade
Mentor	Amanda	White	Female	College Senior
Protégé	India	White	Female	8th Grade

other was a freshman. The mentors were largely first-generation college students, which aligned with the potential first-generation status of the protégés. The matching of mentors and protégés reflected research indicating that mentors who understand protégés' context are more likely to connect with them and have a positive impact on them (*Langhout, Rhodes, and Osborne 2004*).

### Data collection

Multiple sources of data, including surveys, campus visits, interviews, and observations were utilized in this study (*Stake 2003*).<sup>2</sup> Data collection took place at Hill Middle, WSU, and in protégés' homes. Data included two written surveys, two group sessions, field notes, observations, interviews with mentors and protégés, and home visits with legal guardians. Taped sessions and interviews were transcribed and accuracy was verified by comparisons of recordings to written data.

An informational meeting was held to describe the project to protégés' parents and obtain their permission to proceed. One parent attended and home visits were made for the other five participants. Information about the program was provided and permission for a video to be made was obtained. Informational packets (in Spanish and English) addressing financial aid, access to higher education, and programs available were distributed.

### Surveys

Mentors and protégés first met at Hill Middle School where they spent time getting to know one another. A written survey consisting of short-answer questions related to higher education was completed by protégés. Later in the semester, protégés completed a

second survey consisting of essay questions exploring their knowledge of WSU and their postsecondary aspirations.

### **Campus visits**

During fall semester, protégés made three visits to WSU. They attended the Homecoming Game/Tailgate Party, performed a service project, and participated in a physics demonstration. In January, protégés enjoyed dinner and the annual Gospel Festival on campus. In addition to on-campus visits, the WSU women's basketball team presented a workshop at Hill Middle School and mentors met students at Hill weekly. Written field notes and video recordings were collected at each of these activities.

### **Semistructured interviews**

Videotaped individual semistructured interviews with mentors lasted approximately thirty to forty minutes. The focus of these interviews was the perceived impact of the program on both protégés and mentors. Protégés also participated in videotaped individual semistructured interviews lasting about thirty minutes, in which they reflected on their experiences in CARES.

### **Data analysis**

When using qualitative methods, data analysis is an ongoing, iterative process and preliminary analysis occurs even as surveys, interviews, and reflections are completed (*Creswell 1998*). Some themes emerged early in the process, while others were apparent only after considering key words, phrases, and word counts from all of the data. Surveys, interviews, and field notes were independently coded by the investigators. Brotherson and Goldstein (1992) concluded that the use of multiple interviewers and researchers helps mediate possible individual interpretive bias. Data were discussed and codes of interest discovered. Different viewpoints were challenged until consensus was reached. Categories and themes emerged from the ongoing dialogue and led to the study's findings.

### **Trustworthiness**

Triangulation was used to ensure trustworthiness. Denzin (1989) asserted, "By combining multiple observers, theories, methods, and data sources, [researchers] can hope to overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-methods, single-observers, and single-theory studies" (307). Examining interviews, surveys, and field notes as well as using multiple individuals for data analysis allowed us to strengthen our confidence in the emerging themes. At the

completion of the project, all participants viewed a video as a form of member checking.

### **Ethical considerations**

Every effort was made to help participants understand the purpose of the project and what it involved. Participants and protégés' parents signed informed consent forms printed in English and Spanish. Participants were given the opportunity to select pseudonyms. Participants and protégés' parents signed a consent form allowing a video to be produced and released to both the Central City School District and WSU.

### **Findings**

Three major themes emerged from the data. The first is that CARES appeared to increase protégés' college aspirations. Second, mentors experienced personal growth and benefit from their involvement in CARES. Finally, data showed that CARES had the potential to assist protégés in overcoming the negative socialization that characterized their educational experiences. Each finding is discussed below.

#### **Increased aspirations**

Participation in CARES increased protégés' aspirations to attend college by providing access to information that expanded their knowledge and exposed them to new thoughts. Through relationships with mentors who were demographically similar to them, they were exposed to the idea that learning could be fun and began to see themselves as college students. Four categories constituted this theme: protégés' exposure to new options and ideas; protégés' increased sense of purpose; protégés' feelings of acceptance by and connection with mentors; and protégés' recognition of encouragement from mentors.

#### **Exposure to new ideas**

New ideas were introduced to protégés throughout the program. Protégés were provided the space to explore these new ideas as they and mentors reflected on grades, careers, and college access during each interaction. Protégés expressed that this was helpful. Jamal explained: "My ideas about attending college have changed. I had all my mentors tell me how great it is." Exposure to new information and successful mentors caused protégés to think differently about their educational futures. All six protégés were surprised to find that learning could be fun. Two talked about participating

in science experiments at WSU, when protégés saw how motion, gravity, and sound waves worked by participating in demonstrations, and answering questions related to the experiments. One student wrote, “I know that the programs are interesting and fun not just school work.” Describing his mentor, Jamal stated, “He showed me like how college is so fun . . . things he got to learn in college, all the things he got to see.” By exposing protégés to new ideas, CARES showed them that learning was not always boring and could actually be fun.

### Sense of purpose

Over the course of their involvement in CARES, protégés developed a sense of purpose regarding education and the future. Having mentors helped protégés consider the possibility of attending college. CARES staff and mentors encouraged protégés to maintain good grades, connecting grades with a positive future. Chris said, “I got to keep my grades up, and I really want to attend college to go to it and to reach my goal . . . I want to get a good job.” Protégés became increasingly excited about attending college. This enthusiasm came in part from the mentors’ positive attitudes. As protégés became aware of their mentors’ academic success, they began to visualize themselves in successful academic settings. Jayrod stated, “I’m in the honors program, and I try to hold some high standards. I just hope some of that’s rubbed off on him.” Irma added, “College can be fun, you have the choice, you can decide on where you want go with that.” CARES’ impact became clear as protégés began to talk about the importance of being a first-generation college student. Several stated that they wanted to be the first to attend college. One protégé wrote, “I wanna be the only one to graduate from my family. I will be the first one out of my 4 brothers.” These comments illustrate protégés’ growing sense of purpose.

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### Accepted and connected

Gandara and Mejorado (2005) argued that “an important assumption of the identity framework is that mentors, in the form of role models, can help students shape their identity” (97). Protégés identified with their mentors, which helped them form positive identities. Kristin described her mentor’s impact: “When I didn’t

have a mentor, I was never really interested. You guys really got me interested in actually being something in life . . . had a lot of fun . . . enjoying time with you guys, spending time with you guys and just having fun. I want to be somebody in life. She has teach me that there is more to life than sitting down watching TV. I love her a lot, and I'm really happy that I got to meet her, cause there's somebody I can look up to." Another protégé wrote, "My mentor . . . is helping me reach my goals so I can go to college and be a veterinarian, and she is really nice. She's calm." Kristin added: "I just want to say, Irma, that I really love you, and that I'm happy that I got to meet you, and you're always going to be in my heart." Protégés clearly began to feel connected to and accepted by their mentors.

### **Encouragement from mentors and peers**

During one focus group, a discussion about grades arose. As Marta spoke with pride about getting an F, the mentors countered by talking about how protégés needed to maintain good grades to reach their goals, reinforcing a discussion with the women's basketball team, in which team members emphasized the importance of academics. Then other protégés talked about the good grades they had received in fall semester. Kelly mentioned all A's and just one B, and Chris noted he had received all A's since joining CARES. Marta's bragging about her F was diverted to a discussion of and praise for good grades. One protégé wrote later, "if you don't have like good grades, you can't do the things that you want to do." During individual mentoring sessions, mentors offered encouragement to protégés. Irma encouraged Kristin to make good educational choices and explained, "I want to help her find other choices that she never thought she could have in her future, like a career. Kristin is a talented dancer, and wants to continue getting better. I told her, 'You can still take dance classes at the university, you can take ballet, you can take modern dance.'" In each of these ways, the impact of mentors and the CARES program on protégés became clear.

### **Mentors' rewards**

The second theme centered on mentors' growth and benefits. Over the course of the project all of the mentors recognized that they reaped personal rewards from their relationships with the protégés. As the mentors discussed why they chose to be involved in CARES and the rewards and benefits they had gained, it became clear that their reasons for joining CARES and the perceived rewards and benefits were as varied as the mentors themselves.

## Why be a mentor

Mentors gave different reasons for getting involved in CARES. It became evident that college students can be motivated by others' enthusiasm or by their own values and personal experiences. Some students agreed to be involved in CARES partly due to the primary researcher's enthusiasm. Amanda stated, "Kari told me that young people usually decide to go to college because someone encouraged them to do it, told them they could do it, and I thought, 'I'd like to be a person who encouraged someone to go to college.'" Other mentors had different motivations for becoming involved in CARES. Noel stated, "I decided to go into the mentoring, because I went to the schools where we're going to mentor. I know there are not a lot of people that can influence the kids to go to school, 'cause a lot of the people that go around there don't really go to college. And me being the only one from all my friends that went to college, I really want to help out at least one person." Joanne experienced the positive influence of a mentor in her own life and wanted to impact her protégé because of that. Although mentors had different reasons for joining CARES, they all experienced personal growth and meaningful rewards.

## Benefits and rewards

Mentors discussed being rejuvenated, encouraged, and motivated by their CARES involvement. They also experienced growth and a sense of personal satisfaction. Levinson (1978) suggested that a potential reward of mentoring was rejuvenation for the mentor. Noel was rejuvenated when he realized his impact on Jamal: "One thing that I've gotten out of it would be that I see how things kinda change with the way people think through just by knowing one person that has good influence. Jamal, the kid that I'm mentoring, he, at first, just messes around, messes around. But if you really get down to serious and talk to him about it, he thinks about things, and you can have a big impact on your kid." The mentors also felt motivated by spending time with protégés. When speaking about Kristin, Irma said, "She has a lot of dreams, and I really enjoy talking to her and just getting that energy from her, and that actually motivates me to continue dreaming and not just being stuck on taking the next class." College students are often busy concentrating on grades and short-term goals, which can be tiring. Mentoring allows them to be connected to youthful exuberance.

Personal and skill-based growth was another mentor reward. Jayrod felt the experience forced him to mature: "It's forced me

to grow up a lot, and I'm sure the other mentors, it's really helped them to grow a lot, too." The mentors realized they had a positive impact on protégés' futures, which allowed them to see the importance of being a role model as well. The mentors felt a sense of emotional satisfaction knowing they could have a positive influence on another person. Chris's educational plans could be influenced by Jayrod, who stated: "He's interested in being a university student, which is the most important thing of all. Because if he decided he wants to be a university student in eighth grade when he starts making decisions of where he wants to go with his life, he already knows, 'I'm going to college; I'm going to be somebody.' And for me, that's the greatest reward I can get out of being a mentor." Irma felt empowered when she realized her influence on Kristin: "I never thought talking could make, could take her some place she's never been, or even me, too, to realize how much she needed that, how much need she had or still has to talk about these small question/comment . . . questions that she might be afraid of asking in the first place." The data clearly showed personal growth and benefits stemming from mentors' involvement. Although mentors had various reasons for participating in the study, all acknowledged benefits, ranging from rejuvenation and increased motivation to growth in their skills and a sense of emotional satisfaction from seeing their influence on protégés' futures.

### **Overcoming negative educational socialization**

The third major finding was the potential of the CARES program to assist protégés in overcoming the negative educational socialization that characterized their school experiences. In particular, issues with the discipline policy at Hill Middle School illustrated the potential of CARES to help protégés manage the negative impact of policies and practices that impede the achievement of their educational goals. Researchers and staff came to see how the discipline policy, in particular, socialized protégés into believing school is punitive and boring, and discouraged them from considering higher education as an option. Much has been written about inequity and social justice in schools (e.g., *Anderson and Herr 1993; Marshall and Scribner 1991; Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt 1985; Rios and Castaneda 2003*). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) wrote, "In 1991 social activist and education critic Jonathan Kozol delineated the great inequities that exist between the school experiences of white-middle-class students and those of poor African-American and Latino students" (47). Mentoring programs such as CARES may help mitigate some of these inequities.

The Hill Middle School student body consists of 75 percent students of color with 68 percent Latino students. Many of Hill's families live below the poverty level. During visits with protégés' parents in their homes, parents were supportive and helpful. However, it was apparent that their students were not treated equitably within the school, particularly in the enforcement of the discipline policy.

Although the protégés were hand-picked by school officials because of their potential to benefit from CARES, the students struggled with disciplinary issues. Jamal was suspended for five days for defending himself when another student picked a fight. He stated, "It was too strict, I just get behind, like I don't know what we're doing when I come back." Kelly was suspended for a day because she was caught writing on a friend with a marker. She later expressed that writing a paper about why she was sorry would have been a more appropriate sanction. In January, Marta received a disciplinary reassignment because of her inability to get along with the teaching staff. Chris was held in school detention several times for not completing his homework, and India was suspended for excessive absenteeism. Kelly's view of Hill's disciplinary practices was shared by the others: "The Assistant Principle [*sic*], I think is scared. I think he wants everybody gone, doesn't want to deal with anybody because he's scared of kids going out of control. He's heard what Hill is like and everything. They have fights and everything but he's not used to that." The protégés' perception was that the principal and other school officials were afraid of students getting out of control. Consequently, they reacted to every incident with harsh disciplinary action.

Anderson and Herr (1993) stated, "Nothing is more political than the inner struggles of a student to construct an identity in institutions that have the power to legitimate, delegitimize, or simply ignore their voices" (59). Protégés were colored as failures by the school and spent most of their suspension days home alone, unsupervised. They missed lessons and returned to school even further behind. Protégés expressed that they were subject to more severe disciplinary actions than those maintained at other middle schools in the district. Jean Anyon (1981) wrote about social class and school knowledge. She found that when the children in her study spoke about knowledge "no child used words such as 'think,' or 'thinking'; and that most spoke in terms of behaviors and skills" (10). Anyon found a dominant theme of resistance, which can be passive or active. At the beginning of this project, protégés displayed passive resistance by refusing to do homework and active

resistance when skipping school. They described disliking school and the teachers, and spoke about their boring educational experiences. India perceived learning as “just math, and all that’s boring. I don’t like school . . . it’s boring!” Although protégés had knowledge of the rules that governed their expected behaviors at school, they were resistant to gaining knowledge of language, history, or math.

After visiting the physics lab at WSU and interacting with the professor who treated them with respect, protégés realized that learning is not boring. Marta wrote: “I like how they went and they taught us the science project when we went to the science lab. That was kinda cool.” Protégés were ready to absorb knowledge when

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*“Protégés were ready to absorb knowledge when treated as valued individuals and given the chance to remain stable in an educational environment.”*

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treated as valued individuals and given the chance to remain stable in an educational environment. Whether at Hill or WSU, the protégés were delightful and clearly engaged in learning when with their mentors. It is probable that the administrators at Hill viewed the discipline of these students through the lens of deficit thinking. This mindset argues that students of color, particularly those from immigrant families, come to

school with deficits that need to be fixed (*Solorzano and Villalpando 1998*). While these individuals are likely not aware of their propensity to approach students from this perspective, it had a tremendously negative impact on the students involved in this study. The CARES program was able to balance this negative influence by helping protégés establish relationships with educators and mentors who viewed them as individuals with many assets.

### **Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

While the results of this project are encouraging for institutions interested in creating similar outreach programs, two limitations demand attention. First, CARES’ small sample size creates limitations. While a larger program would have the potential to benefit more students, its management would be more complicated, and outcomes could be somewhat diffused due to the restrictions on individualized attention for both mentors and protégés. Studies examining the effect on outcomes in larger programs that involve more than one middle school are necessary to support the continued growth of similar initiatives.

Another cautionary note regarding the findings is that they are the result of only eight months of interaction between protégés and mentors. It is painfully clear to the researchers that our protégés face many barriers to actualizing their educational aspirations. The gap between the protégés' middle school years and the time they actually enter higher education is wide, and continued mentoring and support is necessary to assist protégés in navigating the road ahead. Additional research regarding the impact of long-term engagement with these students is necessary, and would be excellent fodder for future research. While these limitations are important, we believe the results of the study nonetheless support continued exploration into mentoring and outreach programs like CARES.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This study examined how Hill Middle School students' college aspirations changed over the course of their involvement with CARES and how the mentoring relationships impacted the college student mentors. Interviews and written reflections indicated that mentors enhanced protégés' college-going aspirations and that mentors reaped benefits from participating in the program as well. Our findings are significant in two ways. First, they represent an effort to examine the impact of a youth-youth mentoring program in a field where the focus has largely been on adult-youth programs. Second, they offer a view of the impact mentoring can have on mentors. An exploration of each of these follows.

One finding common throughout the mentoring literature is that successful mentoring requires structured relationships with high expectations for mentors (*DuBois et al. 2002; Rhodes and DuBois 2006*). Adolescent identity development theories (*Csikzentmihalyi 1998; Erickson 1968; Gandara and Mejorado 2005*) led to the use of specific activities on and off campus that were developed with protégés' developmental needs in mind. Our study found particular value in structured activities that mitigated protégés' negative educational socialization. Taking protégés to the WSU campus and allowing them to see themselves as part of the higher education culture began to break down their negative feelings about education. Meeting with faculty, staff, and WSU students who believed in them and who did not embrace a deficit mindset encouraged a shift in protégés' perceptions of themselves as students. One line of argument against peer or youth-youth mentoring programs (*Rhodes and DuBois 2006*) is that youth are less likely to make the degree of commitment necessary to connect with protégés on the level necessary for the mentoring to make a difference. We saw the opposite of

this: every mentor who agreed to participate in CARES completed the program and attended every structured event. It is our belief that this contributed to the relationships and benefits reaped by both the protégés and the mentors.

Grossman and Rhodes (2002) argued that mentoring relationships that persisted over a long period of time were more successful in achieving positive results on several different measures, including educational attainment. That our study examined only the first year of the mentoring program is certainly a limitation, and we cannot predict the educational outcomes for the protégés. However, we saw the development of close relationships between mentors and protégés even though the study duration was only a matter of months. When considered alongside Grossman and Rhodes's findings, one implication of our own findings is that outreach programs such as CARES have the potential to be far more effective if the mentoring relationships can be sustained over time. Higher education institutions considering implementing such programs should build these long-term relationships into their models if possible.

Identity development frameworks (Csikzentmihalyi 1998; Erickson 1968; Gandara and Mejorado 2005) and research on effective mentoring (Langhout, Rhodes, and Osborne 2004) reinforced the idea that it was important to intentionally match college students with protégés along specific elements of life experience and identity. As

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*“Mentors felt rejuvenated, encouraged, and motivated and experienced personal and skill growth as well as a sense of personal satisfaction.”*

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we hoped, this matching proved to be a significant component of the program, as both mentors and protégés commented on the bonds that easily developed between them. Making connections with mentors who were from similar backgrounds allowed the process of role modeling to evolve. We observed protégés' sense of themselves—their identities—changing to include images of themselves as college students. We believe that tapping into this source of support and role modeling at the beginning of the adolescent identity-forming process can have a lasting impact on these and future CARES protégés.

Our focus on the impact of the college student participants' experience as mentors brought to light a number of findings that illustrate the positive effect of mentoring for mentors as well as protégés. Mentors felt rejuvenated, encouraged, and motivated and

experienced personal and skill growth as well as a sense of personal satisfaction. Research on college student retention suggests that these outcomes might contribute to the persistence and eventual degree attainment of the mentors. For example, Pritchard and Wilson (2003) indicated that personal satisfaction was an element of emotional health that contributes to persistence. Several mentors described the development of skills related to their coursework, which Tinto (1993) has linked to student persistence. Additionally, the motivation to do well in school mentioned by the mentors can lead to academic success, which is key to persistence (Tinto).

One finding in the literature related to the training of mentors gives us pause. DuBois and others (2002) found in their meta-analysis that a significant factor in the success of mentoring relationships is the continued training of mentors. The CARES mentors received only one intensive dose of training, although they were continually supervised by WSU's coordinator for community service and Hill's director of after-school programs. As we consider further development of CARES, attention needs to be paid to the ongoing training of mentors. While our mentors did not explicitly discuss the limitations on their time as college students, additional training would need to be implemented with their school, work, and family commitments in mind. Further research on the experiences of mentors in CARES and similar programs should look more closely at how time constraints impact the college student mentors and their commitment to the program. Providing small stipends for mentors would make the necessary time commitment easier for mentors. This is particularly true for programs interested in recruiting lower SES and first-generation college students as mentors.

### **Implications of study for policy/practice**

While our study was small and limited in terms of duration, we believe that its effort to examine the impact of a youth-youth mentoring program as well as the experiences of the mentors contributes to knowledge about mentoring programs generally, and outreach programs intended to increase the college-going aspirations of middle school students particularly. In considering the study's contribution to such programs, two implications for enhancing the impact of similar programs on both mentors and protégés grew from our findings.

First, we encourage more exploration into how outreach programs are funded. CARES is a small program implemented by the Community Service Center at WSU. In order to provide significant outreach to larger numbers of students, programs like CARES must

be supported at the institutional level. Staffing is another element of institutional support. From our experience, additional staff is necessary to handle the logistics of recruiting mentors, matching mentors and protégés, planning and implementing on- and off-campus activities, and providing support to mentors.

Second, both the research and our experience support the need for additional mentor training and support. Exposing mentors to identity development theories and teaching them how to interact appropriately with protégés and understand the limits of their mentoring roles are necessary aspects of this training. Further, college student mentors must agree to spend the time necessary to develop supportive and caring relationships with protégés. Expectations of mentors must be made clear at the outset, as mentors leaving the program midstream could be upsetting to protégés.

## **Conclusion**

Students of color and low SES students may not consider higher education a possibility due to their negative educational socialization, lack of exposure to higher education environments, and perceptions of financial and academic requirements for attending college. Programs such as CARES have the potential to provide students with opportunities to become familiar with a college campus and interact with successful college students of similar race/ethnicity, gender, and SES. Improving educational aspirations for students of color and low SES students can help reduce the racial and socioeconomic disparities in higher education. Higher education institutions committed to increasing campus diversity can engage in outreach programs to benefit their institutions and to make a positive difference in the lives of individual students. Further, college student mentors obtain benefits that have the potential to increase their persistence in college. CARES will continue to offer this opportunity to both middle school and college students, and it is our hope that similar programs across the country will positively impact students who have been traditionally underserved and underrepresented in higher education.

## **Endnote**

1. Pseudonyms have been assigned to the city and institutions involved in the study.
2. Transcripts are on file with Kari Petersen, Weber State University.

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