Mentoring project deepened student learning, commitment

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Consuelo Waight, associate professor of human development at the University of Houston, found that students in her graduate-level course on organization development reported a deeper connection to the field after working with a mentor. Credit: University of Houston

Pairing graduate students with professionals working in their field resulted in deeper learning and inspired passion for the work, according

to new research from the University of Houston.

"By taking the students outside the classroom, they saw the relevance and meaningfulness of what they were learning. That motivated them beyond case studies," said Consuelo Waight, associate professor of human development at UH and corresponding author of a paper on the research, tied to a formal mentoring program for students in a graduate-level course on organization development and published in the journal *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*. "Organization development was now personal. It was not a concept in a book."

Organization development is an outgrowth of the discipline of human resources, focused on leading and executing change, whether that involves the merger of two companies, training new employees or other upheaval. Responding to change has always been a core skill in the business world, Waight said, involving the ability to manage how external changes affect a company as well as how the company is affected by internal changes, such as a restructuring or onboarding a new manager.

Waight began asking students in her introductory graduate level class to find [mentors](#) working on organization development in the business world when she first taught the class more than a decade ago. Students are required to keep a diary of their interactions, thoughts and insights arising from those interactions.

She knew it was a powerful experience and ultimately used the diaries to create a dataset to quantitatively demonstrate the impact on students. Mayura Pandit-Tendulkar, associate director of learning for Emeritus Institute of Management, is co-author of the work.

Most research involving academic mentoring has looked at peer mentoring for the purposes of persistence, advancement, achievement,

identity and success, Waight said. This study instead considered how forming a relationship with a practitioner in the student's field can boost learning and understanding of the field.

A second takeaway, Waight said, was that student-kept diaries can be a viable source of research data.

The mentoring project isn't an internship, which are typically focused on objectives set by the employer. In this project, students set the agenda and the mentor agrees to share insights on those topics, often inviting the student to sit in on company meetings, sharing artifacts and otherwise immerse themselves in the field.

Waight and Pandit-Tendulkar concluded that the experience helped the students better understand organization development in several ways: a deeper understanding of the concept; discovery of how widely the concept is used throughout organizations; and recognition that the theories taught in class are put into action in the workplace.

As one student wrote in a diary, "Initially, the universal aspect of OD (organization development) that my mentor spoke about surprised me. I had been considering the practice of OD in a more capsulated way—as a practice that only human resource departments and the like would use. However, speaking with my mentor expanded my view of OD."

Provided by University of Houston