Compatibility of Mentoring Pairs in an Undergraduate Peer Mentoring Program

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Work in Progress: Compatibility of Mentoring Pairs in an Undergraduate Peer Mentoring Program

Introduction

This paper is a work in progress on a Women in Engineering Program practice that outlines a peer mentoring matching process and quantitatively assesses participant satisfaction.

Background

Formal peer mentoring for women students in higher education has been shown to provide important benefits such as significant improvement in psychological experiences in engineering, aspirations to pursue postgraduate engineering degrees, and emotional well-being [1]. It has also been shown that female mentors are more likely than male mentors to positively influence mentees' science careers and that mentees with female mentors are more likely to view their mentors as good role models [2]. The National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released a report in 2019 describing the science behind mentoring programs. Among their results, they found that students with a mentor are more likely to succeed in their major [3]. Similarly, studies indicated that 100% of women in engineering who had women mentors continued in engineering, which is 14% higher than those without mentors and 18% higher than those with male mentors [4].

One type of formal mentoring is a paired mentoring relationship. Paired mentorship can be described as a pair consisting of a mentee and a mentor, where the mentor can share their experiences in the mentee's areas of interest to guide them towards success. Blake-Beard et al. suggest that effective mentorship is based on the ability of the mentoring pair to trust, share strengths with, and authentically engage with each other [5]. They also state that the "fit" between a mentor and mentee, which Bozeman et al. define as the degree to which both the mentors' and mentees' preferences are met [6], influences whether the benefits of mentoring are realized [5].

In formal paired mentoring programs where participants do not choose their counterparts, the process that program administrators use to match mentors with mentees is a crucial component of creating "fit" within a pair. Ortiz-Walters and Gilson found that mentees who perceived their mentors as more similar were more satisfied, felt more interpersonal comfort, and received more support [7]. They also found that mentors who perceived their mentees as more similar were more committed to maintaining the relationship [7]. However, there is minimal discussion, especially in student peer mentoring in higher education, about the pairing process itself [8]. The lack of

current literature on this topic inspired this research team to delve into an existing mentor-mentee matching process to begin examining the strengths and weaknesses.

Program Overview

The Purdue University Women in Engineering (WiE) Mentees and Mentors (M&M) Program is open to undergraduate engineering students and is based on a network-mentoring model where participants can act as mentors or mentees depending on their comfort with the topic and their lived experiences. Approximately 33% of the women undergraduate engineering students (around 1,000 individuals) register for the program annually. In addition, all applicants have the opportunity to register for a paired mentoring program (named the 1:1 or "One-to-One" Program) where first-year engineering students (FYE) are paired with an upperclass student. The goal of the paired mentoring program is for upperclass students (mentors) to help FYEs (mentees) with the transition from high school to college. On average, 75% of the program applicants also choose to participate in the paired mentoring program as either a mentee or mentor.

For almost 20 years, the M&M Program has been matching pairs based on two factors: major and self-determined personality type. There is anecdotal evidence that this method has been successful in creating mentoring pairs with good "fit". In fact, the authors have trained other institutions to use this same matching method and those institutions have also found success with respect to their mentor-mentee pairing satisfaction. However, no prior systematic research had been done to understand these observations.

Mentoring pairs are intentionally created based on a hierarchical matching process, first considering their professional interest (i.e., major) and second interpersonal factors (i.e., self-identified personality type). Initially, all participants are divided into mentee and mentor groups where all incoming FYE students are mentees and all upperclass students are mentors. Next, participants are divided by major so mentors can share experiences in the mentee's field of interest. Finally, mentees are matched with mentors by their self-identified personality type so that the pairs have some common ground to build interpersonal connections.

This work in progress is a first step in understanding whether our pairing philosophy leads to participant satisfaction in their pairing as well as the overall program. This paper utilizes quantitative data gathered from participants to evaluate the pair-matching process. The demographics of the group are discussed, results shared and discussed, and suggestions to improve both this pairing process and to aid other mentoring programs are provided.

Methods

This study uses information gathered from the participants in their program application and in-program surveys to analyze paired mentoring participants' satisfaction with both their pairing and the program. The two in-program surveys used in this study (described below) assessed how the participants were faring with their counterparts. Participant pairs are encouraged to meet weekly and therefore the surveys were distributed 4 weeks apart, affording the participants several opportunities to meet. To counteract survey fatigue, the second survey was sent only to those participants

who completed the first survey to capture a second data point. This study was deemed exempt from the institution's Institutional Review Board.

The research questions investigated are as follows:

- What factors influence the perceived compatibility of a peer mentoring pair?
- Does a peer mentoring program participant's perceived compatibility with their counterpart affect their satisfaction with the program?

Survey One

Survey One was created using Qualtrics and distributed on October 3, 2024 by email to 654 participants. This group contains all original mentoring pairs (i.e., not including re-matched pairs) at the time of the survey opening. Participants who had not completed the survey were reminded twice by email before the survey closed two weeks after distribution.

Participants were directed to the mentee (FYE) or mentor (sophomore, junior, senior) questions based on the academic classification they chose in the survey. Both the content and logic of these question sets were identical except for the use of the terms "mentee" and '"mentor" as appropriate. See Appendix A for the complete survey.

Participants were asked to identify their "ideal" counterpart based on a personality description index originally provided in the paired mentoring program application. In the application, participants were asked to select the description that most reflected their personality (See Appendix A, question 6 for the descriptions). The personality description index is based on work by Faber Birren, a writer and consultant on color theory [9]. However, unlike Birren's application of these personality types, the participants' favorite colors were not to be considered in selecting the most fitting description. The authors use this index because each extended description provides a variety of situational responses the participant may relate to as opposed to a singular label, such as introvert or extravert. For the purpose of this analysis, the colors that were presented to participants in the survey were converted to integer values from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the most extraverted description (i.e., red) and 5 the most introverted description (i.e., blue).

Participants were also asked to rate the following statements on a 4-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to best reflect their experience in the program at the time of completing the survey:

- I am satisfied with my pairing.
- I feel that my counterpart's personality is similar to my own.

Survey Two

The second survey was also created using Qualtrics and distributed on November 7, 2024 by email to the 196 participants who submitted the first survey. Participants who had not completed the second survey were reminded three times by email before the survey closed one week after distribution.

All participants were presented the same questions, regardless of classification. See Appendix B for the complete survey.

Participants were asked to rate the following statements on a 4-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to best reflect their satisfaction at the time of completing the survey in response to the following prompts:

- I am satisfied with my pairing. *(Note: This question is repeated from the first survey.)*
- I am satisfied with my experience in the program.

The following behavioral and interpersonal preference questions were originally presented to participants in the paired mentoring program application. In Survey Two, participants used a a 5-point Likert scale from "not at all important" to "extremely important" to rate how important it was that their counterpart had the same response to the following questions:

- Do you prefer indoor activities (like reading, binge watching) or outdoor activities (like hiking, sports)?
- Do you enjoy large social events or just having a few friends over?
- Are you a procrastinator or a planner?
- When doing homework, do you prefer to collaborate or study on your own?
- Would you rather make quick decisions or ensure you are 100% accurate?
- What genre of music do you find yourself listening to the most?

Program Application

The following data was collected in the paired mentoring program application and utilized in the analysis of survey responses:

- Self-identified personality type (using the same personality descriptions as in Survey One)
- Desired majors of FYEs
- Declared majors of upperclass students

Statistical Analysis of Survey Responses

Using Minitab, the Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated ($\alpha = 0.05$) for relevant factors and their associated responses. If a factor-response pairing showed significant correlation (p-value ≤ 0.05), ANOVA with Tukey pairwise comparison was performed ($\alpha = 0.05$). Analysis of these results provided a better understanding of what participants prioritize in a peer mentoring partner and how it impacts their satisfaction with the pairing and the program.

Demographics

Participants in this study are undergraduate engineering students who self-enrolled in the WiE M&M Program at Purdue University.

Participation in these in-program surveys was optional and participants were made aware of how their feedback would be used. No incentives were offered to complete the surveys and there were no penalties for not completing the surveys. Participants could submit their surveys with questions left unanswered.

Of the 654 participants in the 1:1 Program, 195 participants (108 FYE, 87 upperclass) submitted the first survey. The response rates of the first survey are summarized in Table 1. The second survey was sent to the 195 participants who submitted the first survey. Of these participants, 73 participants (35 FYE, 35 upperclass) submitted the second survey. The response rates of the second survey are summarized in Table 2.

Of the 327 pairs in the Fall 2024 cohort, 10.7% (or 35 pairs) completed the first survey. In the second survey, 31.4% of the 35 pairs (11 pairs) who completed the first survey also completed the second survey.

Results

Survey One

Table 1. Survey One distribution

Classification	Distribution [count]	Submitted Responses [count]	Response Rate [% of distribution]
FYE	327	108	33.03
Upperclass	327	87	26.61

Each of the five personality descriptions were assigned an integer value, with 1 corresponding to the most extraverted trait and 5 the most introverted trait. The differences between participants' self-identified type (from the program application) and their "ideal" counterparts' type were calculated and graphed in Figures 1 and 2. Negative differences indicate the "ideal" counterpart is more extraverted than the participant. Oppositely, positive differences indicate a more introverted "ideal" counterpart.

Of the participants who responded to the first survey, it was found that 51.9% of mentees (56 participants) and 54.0% of mentors (47 participants) indicated an "ideal" difference of 0, meaning their "ideal" counterpart's personality description is the same as their own. For the remaining mentees, 18.5% (20 participants) indicated their "ideal" counterpart would be more introverted while 29.6% (32 participants) preferred a more extraverted counterpart. The remaining mentors followed a similar distribution, with 12.6% (11 participants) choosing more introverted and 33.3% (29 participants) choosing more extraverted.

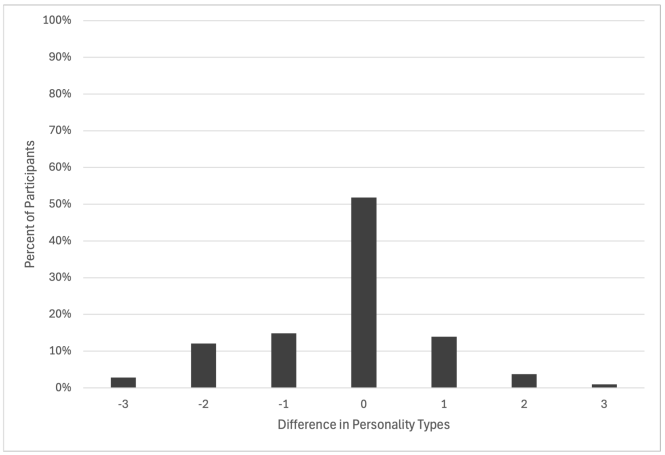

Figure 1. Personality difference between mentees and their "ideal" mentors

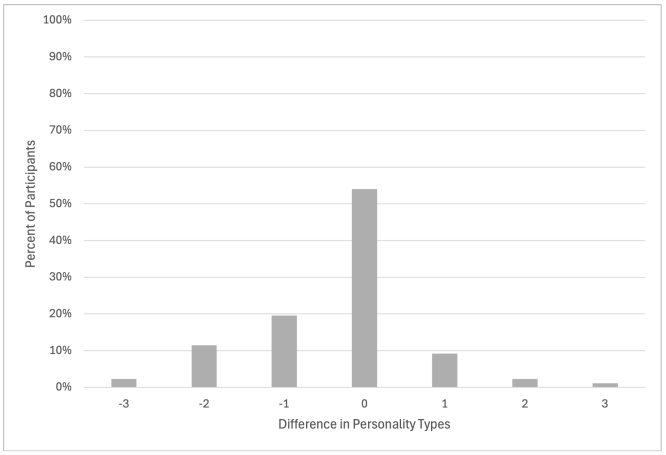

Figure 2. Personality difference between mentors and their "ideal" mentees

It was found that 72.2% of mentees (78 participants) and 79.3% of mentors (69 participants) strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their pairing at the time of completing the first survey. The full distribution of responses is shown in Figure 3.

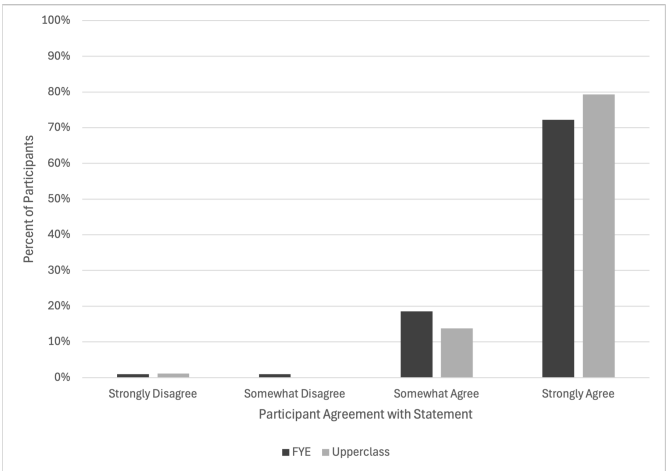

Figure 3. Participants' satisfaction with their pairing, as indicated in first survey

Within pairs where both the mentor and mentee responded to the survey, the average mentee satisfaction with their counterpart was 3.765 and the average mentor satisfaction with their counterpart was 3.829 on a scale of 1 (least satisfied) to 4 (most satisfied). The average absolute difference between the mentor and mentee's pairing satisfaction within each pair was 0.114.

When asked if they felt that their counterpart's personality was similar to their own, 38.9% of mentees (42 participants) and 39.1% of mentors (34 participants) somewhat agreed while 39.8% of mentees (43 participants) and 46.0% of mentors (40 participants) strongly agreed. The full distribution of responses is shown in Figure 4.

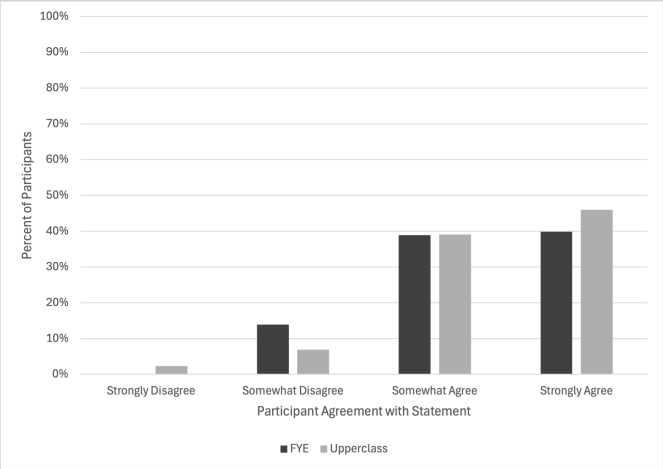

Figure 4. Participants' perceived similarity with their counterpart

Survey Two

Table 2. Survey Two distribution

Classification	Distribution [count]	Submitted Responses [count]	Response Rate [% of distribution]
FYE	108	35	32.41
Upperclass	87	35	40.23

At the time of the second survey, 71.4% of mentees (25 participants) and 68.6% of mentors (24 participants) strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their pairing. The full distribution of responses is shown in Figure 5.

Additionally, 62.9% of mentees (22 participants) and 57.1% of mentors (20 participants) strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their experience in the 1:1 Program, while 25.7% of mentees (9 participants) and 40.0% of mentors (14 participants) somewhat agreed. The full distribution of responses is shown in Figure 6.

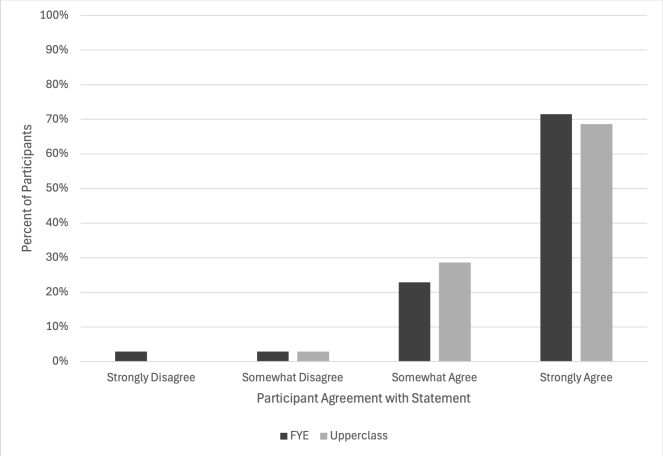

Figure 5. Participants' satisfaction with their pairing, as indicated in second survey

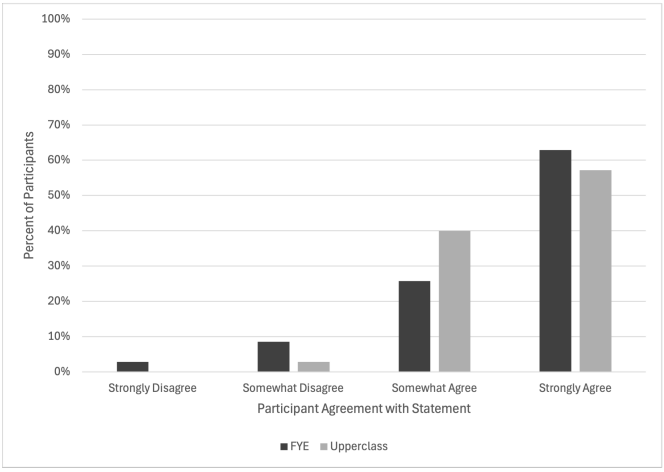

Figure 6. Participants' satisfaction with their 1:1 Program experience

Within pairs where both the mentor and mentee responded to the survey, the average mentee satisfaction with their counterpart was 3.364 and the average mentor satisfaction with their counterpart was 3.545. The average absolute difference between the mentor and mentee's pairing satisfaction within each pair was 0.364.

When participants were asked to indicate the importance of matching behavioral and interpersonal preferences with their counterparts on a scale of 1 ("not at all important") to 5 ("extremely important"), both groups identified "procrastinator or planner" as the most important trait that needs to match, with average scores of 3.22 from mentees and 3.08 from mentors. Participants also agreed that matching "music taste" is the least important. On average, mentees scored "music taste" 1.92 and mentors 2.19. The full distribution of responses is shown in Figure 7.

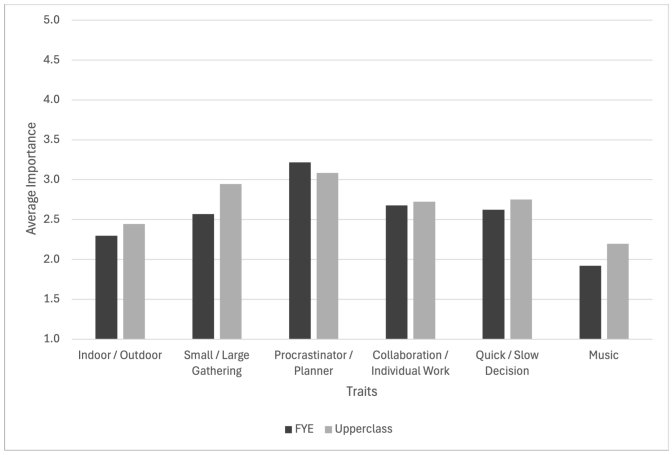

Figure 7. Participants' perceived importance of matching behavioral and interpersonal preferences in mentoring pairs

Correlated Factors

The factors and responses that demonstrated significant correlation within the group of participants who submitted both surveys with no blanks (n = 69) are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Significant factors and responses from participants who completed both surveys

		Pearson Correlation		**ANOVA**	
Factor	**Response**	**Coefficient**	**p-Value**	**F-Value**	**p-Value**
Matching majors	# of other matching traits	0.260	0.031	4.86	0.031
Difference between "ideal" & assigned counterpart personality types	Pairing satisfaction	-0.311	0.009	4.58	0.006
Difference between "ideal" & assigned counterpart personality types	Program satisfaction	-0.358	0.003	4.52	0.006
Perceived similarity with counterpart	Pairing satisfaction	0.387	0.001	4.24	0.008
Pairing satisfaction	Program satisfaction	0.669	0.000	13.72	0.000

Pairings with matching majors (mentee's first or second choice and mentor's declared) had significantly more "other matching traits" than pairings without matching majors where "other matching traits" were the six behavioral and interpersonality preference questions asked in Survey Two.

As the absolute difference between a participant's "ideal" and assigned counterpart personality

types increased, their satisfaction with both the program and their pairing decreased. Participants with personality type differences of two (as seen in Figures 1 and 2) expressed significantly lower satisfaction in both their pairing and the program compared to participants with a difference of one or zero.

When participants were asked about similarity between their counterpart's personality and their own, as perceived similarity increased, so did their satisfaction with the pairing. Specifically, participants who indicated the greatest level of similarity (4 on a scale of 1 to 4) also expressed significantly higher satisfaction with their pairing compared to participants with less perceived similarity to their counterparts.

As participants' satisfaction with the pairing increased on a scale of 1 (lowest satisfaction) to 4 (highest satisfaction), so did their satisfaction with the program. In particular, the participants who indicated the greatest satisfaction with their pairing expressed the highest program satisfaction, while the participants least satisfied with their pairing showed the lowest program satisfaction.

Additionally, some factors and responses were analyzed within the larger group of participants who completed the first survey with no blanks (n = 195) without considering their completion of the second survey. From this, one significant result was identified, which is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Significant factors and responses from participants who completed the first survey

		Pearson Correlation		**ANOVA**	
Factor	**Response**	**Coefficient**	**p-Value**	**F-Value**	**p-Value**
Own personality type	"Ideal" counterpart personality type	0.565	0.000	24.33	0.000

Comparing participants' self-identified personality types to their "ideal" counterparts, a strong positive correlation was observed. This means that a participant's "ideal" counterpart is similar to themself (i.e., extraverted participants are seeking extraverted counterparts, while introverted participants are seeking introverted counterparts).

Discussion & Conclusions

When pairing the mentors and mentees studied in this paper, matching majors and self-selected personality types were prioritized. One research question we examined was whether these factors would influence the perceived compatibility of each mentoring pair. This was supported when, in the first survey, most participants indicated that their "ideal" counterpart would have an equivalent personality type. Although matching on the "other personality traits" (i.e. the behavioral and interpersonal preference questions) was less emphasized in the pairing process, it was found that pairs where the mentor and mentee shared a major also had significantly more behavioral and interpersonal preferences that matched compared to pairs with differing majors.

In the statistical analysis of the participants' satisfaction with their pairings and its effect on their satisfaction with the program, there was a strong correlation between how the participants per-

ceived their counterparts both in relation to their own personality type and their self-identified "ideal" counterpart's personality type. Participants' satisfaction with their pairings also directly influenced their satisfaction with the mentoring program. However, it is interesting to note that, within pairs where both the mentor and mentee responded to both surveys, there was a decrease in both the mentees' (by 10%) and mentors' (by 7%) average satisfaction from Survey One to Survey Two.

This work in progress is an initial study of our peer mentoring pairing philosophy. It is recommended that the Purdue University WiE M&M Program, along with other institutions that may choose to follow this mentoring program model, avoid a randomized pairing process. There is a significant benefit to the participants' satisfaction when systematic matching of majors and personality types is used for making peer mentoring pairs, which makes the time and work involved in manual pairing worthwhile. While more behavioral and interpersonal preferences can be considered when pairing mentors and mentees, the results of this study suggest that matching on major and personality type alone will result in these other preferences matching as well.

Future Work

Future studies could explore these same questions with new cohorts of mentoring pairs to confirm these results are consistent regardless of the cohort of participants. Follow-up surveys can also be sent to all participants, instead of only those who completed the first survey. It may even be beneficial to contact participants who did not complete the first survey with additional questions to investigate their reasons for not responding. Additionally, the research team cannot yet explain the observed decrease in average participant satisfaction between Surveys One and Two, which can also be further investigated through follow-up surveys.

There is the possibility of gathering personality types based on a different scale (i.e., Myers-Briggs, DISC assessment). However, the current application that the authors use to register participants in the mentoring program is extensive, so adding a long personality test may deter students from registering for the program.

After an extensive search, the authors concluded that prior research on factors and/or methodologies used to intentionally match a mentee with a mentor is sparse, particularly for undergraduate peer mentoring. We plan to continue this area of research to elevate the undergraduate peer mentor-mentee pairing process, specifically for undegraduate women in engineering.

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Appendix A

Survey One Questions

1. First Name

Text box presented to participants for written response.

2. Last Name

Text box presented to participants for written response.

3. Fall 2024 Classification

FYE, Sophomore, Junior, Senior

4. Current Major or Intended Major

AAE, ABE, BME, CE/CEM, CHE, ECE, EEE, IDE, IE, MDE, ME, MSE, NE

(Logic Note: For Questions 5 through 10, this set was presented to the mentees, indicated by selecting "FYE" in Question 3. For the questions asked of the mentors, replace "mentor" with "mentee.")

5. On the sliding scale below, indicate where you self-identify between having an introverted (left) or extraverted (right) personality type.

Participants were presented a sliding scale with no numerical values, only endpoint labels. Their response was recorded as an intenger between 0 (fully introverted) and 100 (fully extraverted). The indicator starting point was set to 50 (neutral).

6. Please read the personality descriptions below.

RED is the color of extroversion, or people with desire, appetite, and a will to live life fully. Those who identify with this color have great interest in the world rather than in themselves and are somewhat aggressive, impulsive, and perhaps athletic. They tend to exaggerate and are quick to let others know their feelings and emotions. RED people form opinions rapidly, express them boldly, and choose sides quickly but may be easily swayed from one viewpoint to another.

ORANGE connotes people who are extroverted but are less aggressive and intense than those who chose red. ORANGE is the color of expectation and optimism. ORANGE people are able to make friends readily; they have remarkable talent for small talk. They are generally good natured, liable, and social. Those who select ORANGE care profoundly for people and are natural-born politicians.

YELLOW is a radiant color associated with a high intellect and is preferred by those who have great expectations and who diligently seek self-fulfillment. YELLOWS are well aware of contemporary happenings, have superior minds, and enjoy using their minds. They may tend to be aloof, though not shy. They are often liked and admired for their orderly minds.

GREEN is preferred by those who exhibit a balance between introversion and extroversion. They are constant, preserving, sensible, and respectable, while being social with many friends. They are also ambitious but not unduly aggressive. Of top importance to GREEN people are social standing, financial position, and reputation.

BLUE represents people who prefer a calm life - neat and orderly, with peace and tranquility. They are introverts, often deliberate and introspective but not too intellectual. BLUE people are steady, diligent, hard-working, and have the persistence to become successful and make a lot of money. They are admired and respected for their sensitivity to others and their secure hold on their emotions. BLUES know how to concentrate and how to accept responsibilities and obligations.

7. Based on the personality descriptions you just read, select the one which most reflects your ideal MENTOR.

Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue

8. Have you met with your assigned MENTOR yet?

Yes, No

(Logic Note: Questions 9 and 10 were presented only if "Yes" was selected in Question 4.)

9. How many times have you met with your assigned MENTOR?

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6+

10. Select the statements that best reflect your experience with the 1:1 program.

a. I am satisfied with my MENTOR pairing.

Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree

b. I feel that my MENTOR'S personality is similar to my own.

Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree

Appendix B

Survey Two Questions

1. How many times have you met with your mentor/mentee?

0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8+

2. Select the statements that best reflect your satisfaction.

a. I am satisfied with my mentor/mentee pairing.

Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree

b. I am satisfied with my experience in the 1:1 Program.

Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree

3. What has contributed to your satisfaction with your mentor/mentee pairing?

Text box presented to participants for written response.

4. What has contributed to your satisfaction with your experience in the 1:1 Program?

Text box presented to participants for written response.

5. How important is it that your mentor/mentee would select the same response to the following questions as you?

a. Do you prefer indoor activities (like reading, binge watching) or outdoor activities (like hiking, sports)?

Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important

b. Do you enjoy large social events or just having a few friends over?

Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important

c. Are you a procrastinator or a planner?

Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important

d. When doing homework, do you prefer to collaborate or study on your own?

Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important

e. Would you rather make quick decisions or ensure you are 100% accurate?

Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important

f. What genre of music do you find yourself listening to the most?

Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important

6. What personality or character traits do you believe are most important to be the same when pairing mentors with mentees? Note: Your answer is not limited to just the traits listed in the previous question.

Text box presented to participants for written response.