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Fostering Peer Mentorship Amongst Student Conduct Leaders

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Fostering Peer Mentorship Amongst Student Conduct Leaders

Gianna Metz

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Abstract

The purpose of my study was to explore the peer mentor relationships amongst the Student Conduct Leadership Team at the University of San Diego. My research question is: How can I work with the Student Conduct Leadership Team to further develop peer mentor relationships amongst each other in order to create a more effective hearing process? Based on my experience working with these student leaders, I have observed challenges in group cohesion and connection to the team's purpose. I sought to develop strategies to better advise them in order to strengthen their self-advocacy and sense of belonging to the team. As a result of my research, my findings indicate that a tailored peer mentorship model that is grounded in shared values, accountability, and student led learning is needed in order to strengthen the students' sense of belonging to the team and further improve upon the student conduct hearing process.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Context.....	4
Needs Assessment.....	5
Literature Review.....	7
Methodology.....	10
Cycle Descriptions & Findings.....	12
Cycle One: Individual Interviews	
Cycle Two: Interactive Values Activity	
Cycle Three: Focus Group	
Significance.....	18
Limitations.....	19
Recommendations.....	20
Reflections.....	22
References.....	24
Appendices.....	25
Appendix A: Cycle One Interview Script	
Appendix B: Cycle Two Values Activity Script	
Appendix C: Cycle Three Focus Group Script	

Introduction

The student conduct process generally has the connotation of being very structured and punitive. However, within my role in the Office of Ethical Development and Restorative Practices (OEDRP) at the University of San Diego (USD), I am able to work directly with student leaders and students allegedly in violation of the code of conduct to dispel that myth and promote personal development. As an individual, I value honesty, empathy, and genuine engagement. These three values guide the work that myself and my student leaders do within the context of student conduct. Due to these values, I identified a concern with the student leaders I advise. The Student Conduct Leadership Team (SCLT) works together as a team to conduct peer-led hearings, adjudicating student conduct cases. Within the team are students who have been involved as a hearing officer for multiple years and informally mentor new members. Through this action research project, I sought to see how all of the students can better develop peer mentorship relationships while fostering a sense of belonging to the team and further improving upon the student conduct hearing process.

From working with the team, I learned that they are all very independent, more introverted individuals who are charged with immediately working as a team from their very first training session. Working with them has provided me an opportunity to see firsthand how they manage conflict, build trust, and express empathy toward their peers. From this research, I was able to better develop strategies and programming that will strengthen the team dynamic while also promoting a stronger sense of self-advocacy and belonging for the student leaders. I see the roots of these themes in the work that they do but wish to further develop these skills in order for them to have an effective and dynamic leadership experience. For example, since many of these students have known each other for at least a few months as returning members of the team, they

have established somewhat of a rapport with one another. They know what to expect when meeting with the group as a whole and present themselves as willing to grow as a group.

Context

As the Graduate Assistant for the Office of Ethical Development and Restorative Practices (OEDRP) at the University of San Diego (USD), I primarily worked with student leaders who act as student hearing officers. The OEDRP office primarily handles student conduct cases along with the university's restorative justice programming. The office is overseen by two Assistant Deans and includes a Graduate Assistant, an Executive Assistant, and various undergraduate student desk staff. Within the student conduct process, our office works with undergraduate, graduate, and law students to better understand their choices and behaviors. As an office, we strive to foster a safe campus environment, one that supports the personal development of students and emphasizes their responsibilities to the community.

Within my role as the Graduate Assistant for OEDRP, I was responsible for overseeing and advising the Peer Review Board process. Peer Review Boards are made up of student leaders who hear cases of alleged misconduct. They are charged with reading case files, hearing the case, determining responsibility for alleged violations, and recommending applicable sanctions. The student leaders that make up the board are a part of the Student Conduct Leadership Team (SCLT) and were the students I directly advised, both on conduct processes and personal and professional development. The SCLT attends an annual training in the fall then monthly training sessions thereafter that I developed and facilitated. These training sessions teach them the skills necessary to hear a case in a fair and equitable manner for all parties involved. They learned skills like motivational interviewing, how to recommend appropriate sanctions, and how to challenge and support students going through the conduct process.

Within the team are Senior Members, or students identified as wanting more of a leadership role. In this capacity, students assist the advisor plan training sessions, recruit new members, and facilitate group discussions. This role serves as an additional leadership opportunity for students wanting increased responsibility and ownership of their leadership development. During the research process, three students were identified as Senior Members. However, each role was not solidified or had exact expectations, responsibilities, or learning outcomes unique to each function area. These specific students were more so additional help program coordination and recruitment.

As the SCLT advisor, I am with these students during every step of the process, from training, to the conduct hearing, to the follow up debrief meetings. I serve as the main contact and connection to the OEDRP. Researching peer mentorship amongst these student leaders was important to me because when they do well and are learning and developing, so was I as their advisor. While I was teaching them how to run a hearing, they were teaching me how to adapt to new challenges as an advisor and how to creatively address new challenges in my work.

Needs Assessment

Since I first became the graduate assistant that advises the Student Conduct Leadership Team (SCLT), I noticed a disconnect amongst the student leaders in relation to their group cohesion and peer mentorship relationships. I worked with my supervisor, Assistant Dean of Students, to secure permission and information about the issue. She has been in her current role for over a year and has supervised other graduate assistants who have been the advisor to SCLT. We regularly met on a weekly basis throughout the academic year to discuss the role of SCLT and the progress each student was making. We also developed monthly training sessions for SCLT that addressed specific learning outcomes listed as part of their position description. The learning outcomes provide a framework of what the participants are hopefully getting out of

being a part of the Student Conduct Leadership Team. They are listed in each student's onboarding information as follows:

As a result of participation in the Student Conduct Board, participants will:

- Demonstrate critical and reflective thinking skills along with ethical inquiry.
- Respect the importance of confidentiality in the hearing process.
- Demonstrate professionalism, intellectual growth and civic responsibility.
- Increase awareness and utilization of alternative conflict resolution skills and restorative justice practices.
- Demonstrate the ability to provide feedback to students about the impact their behavior has on the community.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of civility as it relates to building community.
- Recognize the dynamics of privilege and entitlement in the student conduct hearings and work to address these challenges in both themselves and the students they work with.
- Help to create a safe and secure campus environment.
- Participate in community outreach programs and events to educate the community about the Code of Conduct.

Within my background investigation of my topic, peer mentorship is overwhelmingly seen as a positive experience for students. Throughout my research process, I continued to read and research effective peer mentorship strategies and the specific benefits of different models to inform my practices as an advisor and researcher. During this process, I hoped to learn more about the specific peer mentorship needs of my participants and how they can be met via advising tactics or other methods the group identifies as something that could be beneficial.

The Student Conduct Leadership Team is made up of approximately 11 undergraduate and graduate students, 8 identify as women and 3 as men and most of the students identify as people of color. I invited participation from the students via email and in person as I regularly met with them as a part of my role as their advisor.

Throughout the action research process, I intended to regularly engage with my supervisor as well as my critical friends, one who is a Graduate Assistant in Residential Life and another who is the Graduate Assistant in the Center for Student Success at USD. All three of them were able to challenge and support me as I went through the research process. My supervisor provided critical feedback to my reflections, considering that she also knows the team and my responsibilities to SCLT overall. My peers, while working in different offices, were able to provide an outside perspective and challenge me to use best practices during each of my cycles. Overall, I was able to discuss my experience and share my reflections with them throughout each cycle of action research and the post-research reflection process.

Literature Review

As the Graduate Assistant for OEDRP, I had the opportunity to work with student leaders in a nontraditional environment. Due to the nature of their leadership positions, these student leaders are forced to work cohesively as a team and form informal peer mentorship relationships in order to conduct an effective conduct hearing. Many universities do not utilize peer-led conduct hearings, putting this particular group in a unique position. The literature on peer-led conduct processes is limited, which is why I intend to focus my literature on the peer mentorship aspect of working with a team in order to build a sense of belonging and connection. In one study, researchers Bittinger, Reif, and Kimball (2018) find that utilizing undergraduate students in the hearing board process offers them developmental exploration. Using student development theories and experiences, these students also tended to shift between stages of multiple moral and

cognitive theories. Similarly, Colvin and Ashman (2010) describe peer mentorship as fluid and an opportunity to explore multiple roles and identities. Both studies relate to my research because they connect the population I utilized in my research, student conduct leaders, with the issue I explored, peer mentorship relationships. This fluidity and opportunity for exploration allows for flexibility in application. Colvin and Ashman (2010) further explain this fluidity by highlighting that peer mentorship is contextual and highly dependent on what the student being mentored needs in that specific moment. This can vary from needing a coach, advisor, or advocate. Peer mentorship allows for an exchange of roles and creates space for critical evaluation.

Within my research, I saw firsthand how the fluidity of peer mentorship connects to the students' sense of belonging. Amongst the students I advise, this leadership opportunity is one of a few other student organizations that they are consistently involved with. At the beginning of this study, I was interested in this dichotomy of these more introverted students choosing a form of student leadership that is highly dependent on group cohesion and peer mentorship. Many of them have expressed to me that this leadership opportunity is where they find some sense of belonging, either in its connection to their academic or professional goals or to how they see themselves as a student at the University of San Diego. Similarly, DeSousa (2018) finds a few emerging themes, including self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and team collaboration, all of which contribute to how and when students decide to use their voice amongst peers. One major theme from DeSousa's research is how students self-define these themes and operate differently in different contexts. Their sense of belonging stems from their contributions to the groups. DeSousa studied a similar population to mine, student conduct leaders, but mainly focused on female identified students and had a much smaller sample size than I had planned to utilize.

Related to my research, I was able to make recommendations for a stronger group dynamic and therefore a more effective hearing process.

Related to this work, is the need to regularly evaluate and assess peer mentorship programs in order to shape advising strategies. As the Student Conduct Leadership Team's advisor, it is my job to adapt my advising tactics to meet the needs of the team. Collier (2017) examines different approaches to peer mentorship in order to evaluate the most effective and efficient use of resources. He finds that peer mentorship programs are cost effective, creates leadership opportunities for mentors, and helps mentees with identity development. He found these themes by assessing his current peer mentorship program and finding where resources could be redistributed in order to maximize the benefits of peer mentorship, strengthening the need for regular evaluation and assessment.

The benefits and areas of improvement of peer mentorship are also heavily influenced by the narratives from participating students. Bunting, Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson (2012) used narrative inquiry to analyze the experiences of student peer mentors that mentor first-year students. From their analysis came a few overarching themes. They found that the mentors learn best from self-reflection and observation techniques, they learned about personal responsibility, and through community building, learned how to facilitate dialogues with first-year students. Because my study is also qualitative, I specifically centered my methodology and consequent recommendations on the narratives of the students I worked with. Like this study, I analyzed the experiences that were shared with me in order to come to a few conclusions about the nature of the team I'm working with and how advising strategies can better their peer mentorship relationships.

Overall, the studies around peer mentorship focus on the overwhelming benefits of students mentoring students. Erikson (2006) finds that peer mentorship builds community,

develops leadership skills, and provides emotional and social support while qualitatively examining a cohort model of mentorship. Budge (2006) similarly finds that peer mentorship holistically supports the student, that it is more than just an activity that students get involved with. Using both Erickson's and Budge's studies, I hope to expand on this holistic approach and examine what specific benefits my participants may be experiencing as well as how I can specifically modify my advising techniques to address potential areas of growth in order to improve upon the conduct hearing process.

Methodology

In order for me to understand the dynamics of SCLT to address their needs, I needed to conduct my research using methods that support this. I used O'Leary's Cycles of Action Research model. This model is a cyclical process that begins with observation, then reflection, planning, and then finally action. After action, the cycle repeats itself, building off the previous cycle. This model allowed me to constantly evaluate my research practices as each step is improved upon based on the previous step. Because this model builds on itself, I critically evaluated my methods and data while also reflecting on the learning both me and the participants are contributing to (Koshy 2006).

At the start of my research, there were eleven students that identified as members of the Student Conduct Leadership Team. Eight identified themselves as women, three as men, and seven participants identified as a person of color. Across the eleven students, there was a wide range of choice of academic program, year in school, and the amount of extracurriculars each of them were involved with. When initially joining the team, students identified wanting more leadership experience and opportunity to exercise critically decision-making and teamwork as reasons for wanting to participate in the Student Conduct Leadership Team. To promote

participation in my research, I emailed Student Conduct Leadership Team students and talked to them in person about what each of the three cycles entailed. I noted that this was a voluntary process to expand knowledge in this area of study without any material benefits. I was able to garner seven students for cycle one, nine students for cycle two, and one student for cycle three. None of the students were compelled to participate, and if they chose to, they remained anonymous in the data collection.

In O'Leary's model, action research is based on integration and the learning that comes from a cyclical process. Every part of the research process is linked, from the planning, the processes, the findings, and the recommendations (Koshy, 2006). This type of research is relevant for this topic because it generates new knowledge in reference to this particular group in this particular context in order to generate change. While there are many studies on peer mentorship amongst academic programs and support services, this study focused on peer mentorship through the lens of student conduct leaders. The cyclical processes constantly sought to improve the previous action and are based on critically evaluating what is and is not working in order to make appropriate changes. This research method is also participatory, meaning that participants are willingly and knowingly a part of the research and I am learning with them, as opposed to being completely isolated from the group dynamic.

This research method guided and built upon my own epistemological assumptions. O'Leary's model provided flexibility in terms of how cycles are executed, how participants participated in each cycle, and how my own observations and reflections influenced the research process. I believe that this method fostered the values that underpin my work within student conduct. While this model allowed for flexibility, there were a few challenges with scheduling cycles, as this design timeline is very linear and based on building off of the previous cycle,

which I further explain in my limitations. Encountering these challenges were part of the overall learning and the data was still significant in my findings and recommendations.

Cycle Descriptions & Findings

Cycle One: Individual Interviews

For cycle one, I conducted individual interviews with students in SCLT over the course of three weeks in November 2019. At this time, the students knew each other from having participated in at least two monthly training sessions together. I conducted seven interviews, during which I asked questions regarding where they see themselves within the team and if there are specific ways I could strengthen their peer mentorship relationships. See Appendix A for a full list of questions. During these sessions, I was able to understand how each student saw themselves as a mentor or mentee within the team. Of the seven interviews, I found that almost all participants identified themselves as a “team player,” specifically in reference to being a peer mentor. They described wanting to strengthen their overall peer relationships with one another but did not know how to initiate it or predict how it would go. For example, one student who was new to the team at the time stated, “I had a lot of mentors in high school and college but haven’t really thought about having a peer mentor. My transition to the team may have been easier if someone on my level showed me the ropes.” This seemed to be the narrative amongst newer SCLT members and some returning members. They noted themes of not having a lot of experience participating in a peer mentorship program, especially outside of a formal academic relationship, citing instances of tutoring sessions with peers in academic programs.

This particular theme also hinted towards how the team dynamic can be mechanized or predictable. For example, many of the students’ answers were overwhelmingly similar, especially in terms of identifying the team’s strengths and areas of growth. Students identified

efficiency, knowing procedure, and feeling comfortable with the overall process as strengths. While major areas of growth included a weakened sense of cohesion amongst the team and “not really knowing each other.” As I listened to these responses, it began to inform my second cycle and how I would plan for the interactive values activity. As this would be the first time during the research process they would gather as a group and dig deeper into their shared values. In response to cycle one, I made sure to utilize cycle two as an opportunity for the students to take up as much space as possible in sharing responses to my guiding questions and provide ample time for them to talk with each other in pairs and smaller groups. The dynamic of the individual interview also provides a certain level of comfortability for some participants, as I noticed more information was shared in a one-on-one setting, rather than a in the larger SCLT group.

Despite hesitancy regarding how to initiate this relationship, there seemed to be genuine interest in building peer relationships. Along with being a “team player,” students described needing a structured system of peer mentorship that provided accountability. They noted a need for “regular check ins” and “meeting guidelines” that would help frame each interaction with their peer mentor or mentee. The data expressed a need for some form of peer accountability woven into a peer mentorship relationship. They wanted to establish a closer relationship with their peers, but also make sure that time spent together was helpful to their student leadership experience, that they were not just meeting with a fellow SCLT member to fulfill a requirement. They wanted to further connect with one another outside of the formal conduct hearing process, while making sure that the peer mentor relationship could also help them during conduct hearings by making them more attuned to each other’s leadership style.

During these interviews, many students expressed that while they value their leadership experience as a member of the SCLT, they also held other leadership roles in other clubs and

organizations. I began to realize that SCLT, for a lot of students, was not their primary source of connection or belonging to the university, that they found this elsewhere. Students cited their involvement with academic programs, sports, and with peers in their residence halls as their primary source of belonging. While I had a sense that this idea rang true for many of the SCLT students after the first few interviews, this became a major source of reflection for myself as an advisor for this organization. Because advising SCLT is my primary responsibility, I automatically thought these students leaders also viewed SCLT as a priority. However, the student experience is not a singular one and many students find belonging and connection within a wide range of peer groups and interests. Taking this into consideration alongside the students' interest in mentorship and need for a structured system, moving forward I hoped to further explore what this means in terms of their shared values during the second cycle when working together as a group.

Cycle Two: Interactive Values Activity

Two weeks after my first cycle, I conducted the second cycle of research. I invited all eleven SCLT students to a facilitated interactive group activity and nine students chose to participate. This activity consisted of students first brainstorming their individual values in terms of personal leadership, group identity, and the values that strengthened the student conduct hearing process. As a group we then engaged in a discussion to share what we each reflected on. See Appendix B for a complete list of questions. As I listened to the students describe what it means to be a part of this team and how they identified and interacted with the overall team's values, I noted similar themes expressed in their individual interviews. For example, "honesty" and "respect" were continuously brought up in the discussion as the top two values needed to be a successful student leader and to conduct an effective conduct hearing. One student noted that

these two values guided their work in academics and other leadership opportunities, and that it just “made sense” that honesty and respect be fundamental to the hearing process. Furthermore, I noted that their connection to the team, both this specific student and others, relied on how they viewed themselves first as individuals and/or students and then as student leaders. They cited instances of practicing values of “effective communication” and “working with others” in academic projects and really helped to shape how they approached opportunities to take up leadership roles.

When asked how might the values they identified function in a peer mentorship relationship, they expressed that it was “easier to work with someone who you could relate to.” What they needed individually also showed up in what they needed when paired with another student. While it makes sense to gravitate towards peers you easily relate to, this does not always allow for growth and development. For example, this showed up during the activity when I noticed students sitting together with peers I knew they had stronger relationships with. It is natural for friend groups to sit together when having the chance, but part of this research project’s purpose was to expand this circle and develop a stronger relationship as a group. Peer mentorship to this group of students meant an opportunity to connect with a fellow student leader and ultimately have a sounding board to understand the unique role of a student hearing officer. They expressed that peer mentorship could function as a way to further develop the shared values of honesty and respect, that it is an opportunity to bridge the gap between students who may not feel as connected to the team as they want to be.

Furthermore, there was significant overlap in the responses to what values are needed for both an effective peer mentorship relationship and an effective hearing process. When students were talking amongst themselves in pairs, one pair shared that they both value “effective

leadership.” One student described this showing up when “leading a discussion or helping other students understand a new process.” This became one of my most significant findings as students touched on this during their individual interviews and in casual conversations. Some mentioned wanting more of a voice in building training session content and facilitating it during training. Students noted that both peer mentorship and the conduct hearing process requires leadership; students look toward each other for that guidance when working together. When asked to go more in depth, another student expressed an interest in brainstorming future training topics and how as a group, we could tie in future peer mentors and mentees. Once one student brought up this topic, there seemed to be a consensus that incorporating more student-led and student developed content is necessary to grow as a team overall.

Cycle Three: Focus Group

During this cycle, which occurred one week after cycle two, my intent was to debrief the previous cycle as well as gain a detailed sense of what the students would like to see implemented. From the previous two cycles, a few themes emerged. Students were interested in peer mentorship, they wanted a greater sense of accountability to the team, and they expressed a strong interest in developing training content. From these themes, I wanted to see if I could ask questions that helped guide them toward implementation of their suggestions. See Appendix C for a full list of questions. This cycle mainly functioned as a way for myself and the SCLT to create recommendations in regard to advising strategies in order to strengthen peer mentorship relationships and improve the hearing process. However, only one student attended the focus group, which then morphed into an individual interview due to the lack of participation. Initially, I scheduled this cycle to take place in December 2019 taking into account final exams that would be taking place the following weeks. However, what I did not anticipate was how

busy students would be preparing for final exams during every free block of time. In the week between cycles two and three, many students including myself were preoccupied with filling their primary role on campus of being a student intent on succeeding academically. I received many last minute cancellation notices due to scheduled study sessions, but I still wanted to meet with the student who chose to show up and discuss the cycle two activity and the overall research process.

Despite there only being one student, they described the values activity as a “good first step” in “connecting with others.” They also noted that helping to connect each student back to the Student Conduct Leadership Team’s purpose may assist in developing peer mentorship relationships and therefore an effective conduct hearing process. They stated that they think, “getting everyone on the same page about why we’re here and doing this type of work is important.” Furthermore, they went on to express “sometimes I forget I want to be more of a leader and take on more responsibility because it is just easier just to go with the flow and rely on advisers and other staff to take the lead, especially when we have a ton of other responsibilities going on.” This observation was key for me as a researcher because it showed that students sometimes need space and an extra reminder that they can make anything into a leadership opportunity with the right guidance. This also ties in with students expressing that SCLT is not their primary source for belonging and connections. They previously mentioned that they are involved with other experiences on campus that they sometimes place more importance on. Overall, this student made me question again the role of the advisor and what the advisor, alongside the students, could recommend and co-create for implementation to address these needs.

In doing so, I gained a greater sense of what needed to be recommended for program implementation that would reflect what I observed and participated in during each cycle. The most significant findings throughout all of the cycles were that these particular students require more opportunities to connect with one another and take up leadership roles, something that mainly framed my recommendations. They were able to connect with their advisor one-on-one, share with each other their specific take on personal and group values, and debrief what that means going forward.

Significance

As institutions evaluate and consider peer-led student conduct processes, my work with this particular set of students shows that this leadership and involvement opportunity is valuable. Students enjoy more diverse opportunities to work with their peers and participate in experiences that offer learning for all those involved. Throughout each research cycle, students expressed that due to the serious nature of their work in student conduct, making genuine connections or establishing a peer mentor relationship sometimes is not a priority and it can be difficult. However, their involvement is unique and worth it. They must work together to fact find, determine outcomes, and effectively discuss and communicate to their peers what it means to have an impact on an entire community.

This experience does not always translate across all types of student leadership. This research process has shown that being a student leader within student conduct offers a sense of belonging and connection that is based on teamwork, setting and achieving goals, and a willingness to make difficult decisions. Their unique experience is one that helps to establish deeper relationships with one another as well with the university community. It is not always

easy having difficult conversations with other young adults your age, but these particular students view it as an opportunity to learn about themselves as well as others.

Limitations

Overall, this research project fortunately went according to plan despite a few challenges. The main challenge being a lack in participation, especially in the third cycle. It was disappointing to hold a focus group that only one student participated in, but understandable considering the increased stress of the academic year toward the end of a semester. I had scheduled the focus group to take place during the afternoon where no classes were in session for all university students. However, the focus group was also scheduled for the week before undergraduate final exams took place. Many students were busy preparing for exams and using this time to meet with study groups and attend office hours with professors. While this morphed my focus group into an individual interview, talking with a student who had been involved with all of the cycles to conclude the research process and offer some final thoughts regarding moving forward.

While SCLT is typically a group of 10-15 students, outreach to a broader group of students and possibly to administrators and staff hearing officers may have yielded a more robust response to how a team of hearing officers operate in a conduct hearing. Having a greater variety of hearing officers may have also created more suggestions for how these student leaders could connect with one another, outside of peer mentorship. Additionally, not all SCLT students were represented in all cycles of the research process. Each cycle and each student's participation throughout the entire process was optional, but hearing more of the student perspective, especially in the focus group, may have provided a more holistic perspective of my investigation of the team's needs and opportunities for change.

Recommendations

My recommendations for change are threefold. First, I believe that the overall team dynamic of SCLT needs to be re-evaluated, specifically the Senior Member position descriptions. Within SCLT, there are three students identified as Senior Members, or students that have the most experience and wanted more of a leadership role. In these positions, SCLT students help with recruiting new members, serve as the Chair in student conduct hearings, and plan monthly training sessions. I recommend that the position descriptions be evaluated to include more opportunities for student-led program development and facilitation. During the research process, students expressed interest in content creation in regard to hearing officer training and mentorship. Utilizing students in the training development process would address this need while also extending the chance to exercise an increased sense of responsibility. Having more responsibility and stake in building training content would give students a sense of ownership in their learning. Having these task built into the position descriptions would increase accountability and establish the additional expectations of being a Senior Member within the structure of the role.

Similarly, I recommend the format of training sessions be evaluated to include more of the student voice. For example, inviting SCLT students to planning sessions or improving evaluation surveys to include more poignant questions can help to increase engagement and the students' overall connection to the team's purpose and members. Tying everything back into the purpose and learning outcomes may strengthen the connection to the team, but also ensure all SCLT members are on the same page about why they chose this specific leadership opportunity to pursue. Students want to show that they are able to take up leadership roles, so as their advisor it is important that I am doing what I can to foster and promote this. Having more

student developed and led content gives students stake in their learning as well as an opportunity to explore and develop in presentation and facilitation skills.

Lastly, tailoring a peer mentorship program for SCLT students would help to increase the sense of belonging students want to feel to each other. Implementing a pilot program where returning SCLT students are paired with newer students who look to gain more experience will be helpful in establishing greater accountability. While these relationships are moldable and can look different depending on the students involved, having another peer they can meet with about the student conduct hearing process or their overall experience with the team can function as a resourceful sounding board for students, especially newer students. These pairings need to be structured in terms of setting peer mentor expectations and goals to hold each other accountable.

Students, while open to peer mentorship, shared during the research cycles that this relationship must have a purpose and produce outcomes that will benefit all parties. To establish this, the identified peer mentor would reach out to the mentee to begin the conversation around expectations and learning outcomes. This greater sense of accountability would also help with low participation. Similar to the focus group cycle, required monthly training sessions sometimes see a low turnout during busier times in the academic year. Having a peer mentor or mentee, one that the student is connected to and has established rapport with could increase this participation by offering regular check-ins outside of the established advisor role. One of the main challenges SCLT students identified in the research process was connecting with one another outside of the formal hearing process. This pilot program would connect students outside of the conduct hearing space and give them an opportunity to share their experiences with a fellow student hearing officer, one who is participating in the same experience but may have a different perspective.

Reflections

As I facilitated cycles and connected with SCLT more closely as their advisor, I realized that SCLT was not their main source of belonging on campus, that they found that connection in other groups or organizations. Therefore it was challenging trying to foster a greater sense of belonging when students did not view that as a priority. Although they expressed wanting a greater connection to the group overall, the nature of the work that they are charged with, hearing conduct cases, does not explicitly present itself as the primary source of engagement on campus. So while SCLT was a priority for some students, most viewed it as an additional form of leadership they participated in. Although I had a sense of this prior to initiating this research project, it especially presented itself while conducting interviews and just speaking with these students.

Similarly, throughout this process I found myself internalizing all of the suggestions and feedback students provided during the cycles. For example, when a student mentioned wanting more oversight in hearings, I questioned if I was providing that adequately or if there are ways I can adjust my own practices to accommodate this need. I think this speaks to the participatory nature of action research. I found myself insecure about whether or not I was meeting those needs and much more aware of how my role as an advisor shows up in their learning and development as student leaders. The overall research process taught me that occasionally moving away from routine and always creating space for all voices in the room to evaluate program content and team dynamic is important. When given the space, students want to have a voice in the room to make suggestions. This process emphasized how much I like to rely on predetermined routines and expectations to fulfill established learning outcomes. It is much more comfortable doing what was previously set in the agenda, however it is much more fruitful

learning and adapting from each new set of students wanting to further develop as leaders. This process centered student voices at the forefront, allowing me to refocus my attention to the needs they presented.

Although, I functioned as the primary researcher, I was working alongside my population and learning with them in order to listen, understand, and address their needs. This is also something that I did not realize was happening while conducting cycles. Being able to reflect during each cycle of research allowed me to check in with myself and the progress of my research goals to see what was and was not working. Reflection helped guide the next cycle as well as provided me a chance to pause and check in with my critical friends. They noted that having space between cycles and throughout the research process was helpful for all those involved, not just the researcher. I did not realize the impact of this until I began to sort through the collected data and see where more space and reflection could have yielded more participation. Overall, I am grateful for this opportunity to further connect and share time with a group of students that truly embody leadership.

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Appendix A: Cycle One Interview Script

Introduction to be read aloud by Principal Investigator: Hello, thank you for participating in my first cycle of action research: individual interviews. I have a series of questions for you. Please try to answer honestly and note that you can choose to skip a question or come back to it later in the interview. If you don't mind, this will be voice recorded. Your name or other identifying factors will not be used or shared. Are you ready to begin?

1. What are your general thoughts about the student conduct leadership team in regard to how the team works together in hearings?
2. What are the team's strengths?
3. What are the team's areas of growth?
4. How would you describe your role on the team?
5. Do you feel a sense of belonging to the team when participating in hearings?
6. Could you identify strengths and areas of growth within your role as a student leader?
7. What has been your experience with peer mentorship? Either as a mentor and/or mentee.
8. Do you have an interest in mentoring or being mentored by another member of the student conduct leadership team?
9. If paired with a peer mentor, what would this relationship look like?
10. If paired with a peer mentee, what would this relationship look like?
11. What needs need to be addressed in order to have a successful peer mentorship relationship?

Conclusion: Thank you for your responses. This will better inform my work with the Student Conduct Leadership Team. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Appendix B: Cycle Two Values Activity Script

Introduction to be read aloud by Principal Investigator: Hello, thank you for participating in my second cycle of action research: a group interview. Firstly, take a few minutes to write a list of your personal values. Reflect on why these values are important. Once this is completed, I have a series of questions for you written on large pieces of paper. Take a few moments to write down responses to the questions on post-it notes and attach your answers to the large pieces of paper. Once everyone that wants to participate chooses to, I will ask some follow up questions. Please try to answer honestly and note that you can choose to skip a question or come back to it later in the interview. If you don't mind, this will be voice recorded. Your name or other identifying factors will not be used or shared. Are you ready to begin?

Questions written on paper:

1. What are three of your top values?
2. What values are needed for an effective peer mentorship relationship?
3. What values are needed for an effective hearing process?

Follow up questions:

1. Would anyone like to share what they wrote about?
2. What were some of the specific values you wrote about and why are they important?
3. How can you incorporate these values into your work as a student leader?
4. How might your values show up in a peer mentorship relationship?
5. Not everyone's values are the same, what does this mean in regard to the team dynamic?

Conclusion: Thank you for your responses. This will better inform my work with the Student Conduct Leadership Team. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Appendix C: Cycle Three Focus Group Script

Introduction to be read by Principal Investigator: Hello, thank you for participating in cycle three of my action research: a focus group. For the next hour, I have a series of questions I will be asking the group in order to debrief the values activity and get everyone critically reflecting. Please try to answer honestly and note that you can choose to skip a question or come back to it later in the focus group. If you don't mind, this will be voice recorded. Your name or other identifying factors will not be used or shared. I ask that you please leave what is discussed during the focus group in this room and anything discussed that contains identifying information will not be shared with others. Anonymity will be honored in my research. Are you ready to begin?

1. What are some general thoughts about the values activity?
2. Were you able to identify your personal values?
3. What parts of the activity were easy or difficult?
4. Were you able to connect with others about shared values?
5. What did you learn about yourself or the team?
6. How can you use skills learned from the values activity within your role as a student leader?
7. How can you use skills learned from the values activity as a peer mentor or peer mentee?

Conclusion: Thank you for your responses. This will better inform my work with the student conduct leadership team. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.