“Not the first-year you expected”: supporting new university students through peer-to-peer mentorship programming during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

By

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Executive Summary

This report conducted research on how peer-to-peer mentorship programs could impact positive student outcomes for new students at UVic.

Since the beginning of the pandemic there have been significant and ongoing disruptions to the academic, social, and wellbeing engagement capacity of new UVic students. In response to these conditions, The Office of Student Life created a virtual peer-to-peer mentorship program, *New Student Connect*, that launched in September 2020 and concluded in April 2022. This program appeared to demonstrate positive outcomes for students who participated and left the office wanting further research conducted on the impact of peer-to-peer mentorship programs within a students first-year experience.

The methodology of research for this project takes a promising practices approach to the literature review, supported by a needs assessment approach to data collection. The literature review informed the development of an analytical framework by which the qualitative data was assessed. Qualitative data collected from first-year UVic students in a survey was thematically coded and analysed to identify what students think would make a peer-to-peer mentorship program meaningful, beneficial, and accessible.

Both the literature on student experience programming and findings from the student survey suggested that peer-to-peer mentoring experiences could be a high-impact intervention on student engagement capacity and positive student outcomes.

The literature review explored the meanings of "positive student outcomes" from both an institutional perspective and a student perspective. Institutionally, positive student outcomes include a student's participation, performance, and their persistence to graduation. Individually, it is recognized that each student develops unique hopes and expectations for their experience at university – thus, positive student outcomes can be understood as the degree to which those hopes and expectations are realized. To understand these hopes and expectations research looks to the overall 'experience' of being a student, how that impacts the individual, and what trends can be identified within first-year student experiences that lead to positive student outcomes.

Current studies show that students are concerned about the impacts of COVID-19 and the experience of isolation from their peers. They are further concerned about their financial position, time management, their mental health, the quality of instruction/interaction they receive in the classroom, sexualized violence, and their progression toward personal and professional development. Additionally, the literature suggests that BIPOC and gender-diverse students are concerned about their safety and inclusion within the university community.

To support positive student outcomes for learners, institutions can create meaningful opportunities that enhance the student experience. These opportunities are effective when they

support a student's social connectivity, academic integration, and wellbeing, and sense of equity. Peer-to-peer mentorship programming is a demonstrated to be a high-impact intervention.

The analytical framework for this project organized the findings from the research into the following student experience domains: social; academic; wellbeing; and 'equity, diversity and accessibility'.

Survey participants were students who had just completed their first year of studies at the University of Victoria. 82 participants completed the survey. The survey questionnaire was 11 questions long, and participants were asked to provide written answers (in sentences/paragraphs or bullet points). It was organized into 4 sections, and findings were analysed for each of these sections:

Section 1: Reflect. In this section, participants reflected on their thoughts and feelings before they began your studies at UVic.

Section 2: Identify. In this section, participants reflected on their experience of being a UVic student so far and noted impactful experiences.

Section 3: Imagine. In this section, participants shared their ideas, suggestions, and thoughts about what would make a peer mentor program meaningful for new students at UVic.

Section 4: Looking Forward. In this section, participants compared what they believe now to what they believed before they began their studies at UVic.

Socially students were concerned with their sense of belonging, social-connectivity and creating new friendships, their experience of loneliness, and their participation within a group. **Academically** students were concerned about their performance, connecting with academic peers, and feeling motivated and inspired by their coursework. The research participants frequently noted the experience of feeling overwhelmed and stressed during the lowest points of their year and identified many ways their mental **wellbeing** suffered due to the impacts of their university experience. Some participants noted ways that their experience of **equity, diversity, and accessibility** was either supported or challenged, demonstrating an inconsistency within that experience. Participants also expressed frustration and concern around the impact of COVID-19 – for their physical health, mental wellbeing, and capacity to engage academically and socially.

Overall, research participants were able to identify multiple ways that having an upper year peer mentor could have made an impact on their first-year experience that might have supported more positive student outcome. They noted the perceived benefits of having a mentor **socially** support them through providing advice, guidance, and support; by being a 'listening ear', and by helping them connect with others and participants in the community; **Academically**, they suggested a mentor could provide guidance based on their own experiences and a student in a shared faculty; In terms of **wellbeing**, they suggested that a mentor could provide resources and

referrals, and information about ways to get help; and for **equity, diversity, and accessibility** they suggested that a mentor could connect with them over a shared lived-experience and support them if they experienced barriers to accessing university.

This report recommends the creation of a peer-to-peer mentorship program for new undergraduate students as a high impact strategy to promote positive student outcomes. Recommendations are made based on the findings in the following areas:

Program structure: The program should be structured in a way that introduces participants and mentors to one another before the university year begins; should be strategically marketed; should include cohort groupings based on faculty, identity, or lived-experience; should include a leadership and support hierarchy within the design; and should be offered both virtually and in-person.

Matching mentors with program participants: Group mentees with a peer mentor in their faculty, and whenever possible, within their own program of study; allow mentees to identify their preferences for a mentor that centres their sense of comfort, personal identity, and lived-experience; allow mentors and mentees to indicate their personal interests, goals, and/or expectations from a mentoring relationship; develop a framework for ongoing communication between mentors and mentees.

Addressing the proposed student experience domains (social, academic, wellbeing, and 'equity, diversity and accessibility') through programmatic activities: Various training recommendations to support mentors in addressing each domain within their regular interactions; Integrating social events within the scope of the program; creating partnerships with faculty leadership; selecting mentors based on their capacity to appropriately support and act upon wellbeing concerns; and forming partnerships with university and student-lead advocacy and support bodies on campus to provide guidance on program development and operations.

This report identifies areas for further research including: researching the impact of being a peer mentor on positive student outcomes; developing a more holistic understanding of how peer mentorship programming could impact positive student outcomes for specific faculties, mature students, graduate students, transfer students, students with a disability, and students of colour; using a culturally relevant research methodology to explore the potential impacts of peer mentorship for Indigenous students; assessing barriers that students face in accessing a peer mentorship program; and conducting a longitudinal study to identify the impacts, if any, that participating in a 'first year' peer mentorship program have on positive student outcomes toward at the time of them leaving the institution.

Contents

Tables and Figures

1.0 Introduction

1.1 General Problem

The experience of being a new University of Victoria student has changed a lot in the last two years, largely due to conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Where university has 'happened' during that time – the sudden shift to online in March 2020, the gradual return to face-to-face in September 2021, the emergency return to online assessment in December 2021 and virtual instruction for the first 2 weeks of the 2022 term – has foundationally impacted how services and programs are delivered to students at UVic. As the Spring 2022 semester came to an end, the university community once again adapted to the public health realities posed by the ongoing global rise of a new variant and a push for more face-to-face opportunities. The community has cautiously returned to in-person instruction and service delivery, though COVID-19 infections continue across the country. It is an uncertain, often isolating, time. The short- and longer-term impacts and outcomes these changes have on the student experience – for both individual learners and the community as a whole – can only be speculated given the continued nature of the pandemic, however there is already emerging evidence that academic engagement, mental health, and overall wellbeing has declined for students who attended post-secondary studies during the pandemic (Halliburton, Hill, Dawson, Hightower, & Rueden, 2021; Wester, Walsh, Arango-Caro, & Callis-Duehl, 2021).

It is well understood that there is a connection between a student's academic, social, and wellbeing experiences at university and positive student outcomes (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Lewis, 1984; Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006). Since the beginning of the pandemic there have been significant and ongoing disruptions to the academic, social, and wellbeing engagement capacity of new UVic students. It is challenging to predict how long this public health crisis will continue to impact the day-to-day lives and operations within the UVic campus community. The initial research proposal for this report cited a UVic news release that stated "*It is anticipated that the Spring 2022 term will be entirely in person"* (University of Victoria, 2021) – yet, by January 2022, the university moved classes online for 2 weeks as COVID-19 case numbers surged. Even now, as the first draft of this report is submitted for review, recent data shows increasing numbers of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations across the country and Health Canada suggests the virus will continue to evolve and circulate (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022). We do not know what the next wave of infection will mean for our community and institutions within it. To be responsive to the changing nature of this context, this report aims to address positive student outcomes in both a "pandemic" context, as well as a general "best practice" context.

UVic's Office of Student Life (OSTL) offers programs intended to support student transition, development, and engagement. As the experience of being a UVic student continues to change due to the realities posed by this pandemic, the strategies used by the Office of Student Life for engaging new students within the university community have also changed, and continue

to change, to address emergent student needs and challenges. This project explores the potential of peer mentorship programming as a strategy for supporting new students through their social, academic, and wellbeing experiences at university. In September 2020 the Office of Student Life introduced a peer mentorship program called *New Student Connect* as a direct response to the new student transition challenges anticipated in the unexpectedly "virtual campus" climate. This program was intended to help new students experience a sense of community and support, and to help connect them with resources and information relevant to their experience. Though this program was developed as a response to the pandemic context, there is a desire to know how peer-support programming offered by the Office of Student Life beyond the pandemic might support positive student outcomes on campus.

This report aims to outlines how peer mentorship programming can influence the UVic student experience toward positive student outcomes, and what current UVic students would find most beneficial, meaningful, and valuable if they were to participate in a peer mentorship program. This report will further make recommendations of programmatic interventions and areas for future research to support positive student outcomes for new students at UVic.

1.2 Client & Context:

The client for this project is the University of Victoria's Office of Student Life (OSTL). This project will be presented to Kirsten McMenamie, Director of the Office of Student Life.

Every student who enters the University of Victoria carries unique hopes and expectations for what their experience will be like. They consider how success at university, whatever success means for them personally, will influence their future. They have goals and aspirations. They hope to experience connection and growth – both academically and socially. They hope to thrive within the university community. In September 2020, UVic virtually welcomed over 4000 new undergraduate students. For most of these students, this was their first experience in higher education – and it was neither what they had hoped for, nor what they expected for their first year. The university was faced with a challenge: given these circumstances, how does UVic best facilitate a curricular and co-curricular experience for new students that contributes to positive student and institutional outcomes?

One of the many responses from UVic Office of Student Life was the development of a peer-to-peer mentorship program called *New Student Connect* ("*Connect*" or "*Connect* program"). Peer mentorship has proven to be an effective strategy for promoting student engagement and student development – both for upper-year student mentors, and for new-student mentees (Jacobs, Atack, Ng, Haghiri-Vijeh, & Dell'Elce, 2015; Griffiths, Kopanidis, & Steel, 2018).

The *Connect* program aimed to help support the institutional integration of first-year students through peer-to-peer connection (University of Victoria Office of Student Life, 2022). Within the *Connect* program, upper-year student mentors (called "Engage Leaders" or "ELs")

were partnered with new UVic students. Throughout the academic year the ELs invited new students to virtually check-in about how their experience is going and to offer resources, encouragement, and guidance for academic and social support. Further, ELs worked as part of a team to develop and deliver opportunities to bring first-year students together through social programming. Finally, ELs curated a virtual community space where they share information and promote engagement opportunities. The goals of the *New Student Connect* program were as follows:

A student who participates in the *New Student Connect* program:

- Builds meaningful relationships
- Knows resources and where to find help, support, and services
- Feels a sense of belonging at UVic
- Is excited to continue studying at UVic

(UVic Office of Student Life, 2021)

Due to the emergent context of COVID-19 and the university's response to it, this program came together quickly. It was designed based on the knowledge and lived-experience held by the program design team, information gathered from a scan of mentorship programs at different institutions across Canada, and with input collected through a survey of incoming students administered before the academic year began. In my position as Program Manager, *New Student Connect* with the University of Victoria, I, the researcher, oversaw the development, implementation, delivery, ongoing assessment, and responsive growth of the *New Student Connect* program. I worked as part of a team within the OSTL who were responsible for student life programming. In my role I directly supervised and co-supervised a team of professional staff who, in turn, supervised large groups of student leaders in volunteer and part-time paid roles within the *New Student Connect* program.

In September 2021, the University of Victoria once again welcomed new students during a time of considerable institution-wide uncertainty. There were still outstanding questions about how and where students will engage with their studies, their peers, university services, and wellbeing support throughout the year as the university responded to the changing public health emergency – but it became evident that the institution should be prepared to offer services and experiences virtually. Even before the pandemic there was a notable increase in the development of and demand for online or hybrid learning options, as they can offer significant flexibility and accessibility for learners, staff, and instructors (Robinson & Hillinger, 2008, pp. 103-106; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020, pp. 6-9; Kayyali, 2020, pp. 64-71; Shah, Pabel, & Richardson, 2021). As virtual academic engagement opportunities grew on campus – hastened by the pandemic – it was also important to learn how social and wellbeing supports are best received by students within a hybrid learning and teaching environment. As peer mentorship programming is virtually accessible, it has the potential to play a role in offering social and wellbeing interventions for new students – however, it is an area that requires further study.

The *New Student Connect* Program wrapped up in April 2022 as the institution anticipated a full return to face-to-face instruction for September 2022. However, the Office of Student Life is beginning to explore the strategies and practices that are most effective in engaging new students virtually or in hybrid environments, and just "generally". Within the professional practice of student affairs it is understood that "the clearer our understanding of student engagement and the influences on it, the better positioned we will be to meet the needs of students, to enhance the student experience, and to improve the educational outcomes" (Kahu, 2013, p. 769). The original iteration of *Connect* was developed as a response to an emergency situation, and in that time the student experience has changed in unpredictable ways. The Office of Student Life hopes to develop a clearer understanding of the current new student experience, and what types of support – offered through Peer mentorship or other institutional interventions – are most accessible, beneficial, and meaningful for students.

1.3 Research Question & Project Objectives:

The purpose of this research project and report are to address the question: **How can peer-to-peer mentorship programming support positive student outcomes for new UVic students?** Findings from this research will be used to inform the programmatic recommendations offered to the New Student Engagement team within the Office of Student Life.

This research has invited participants to share their experience as a student at UVic through a written questionnaire. This research method was designed to capture experiences from a cross section of students reflective of institutional enrolment status. However there are limitations to the extent to which this research can evaluate the experiences of many UVic students.

1.4 Limitations of this Report

The experience of Indigenous students cannot be unwoven from the violence of colonialism, white supremacy, and systemic oppression that Indigenous people previously and presently experience within every level of Canada's institutional structures. Institutions of higher education in Canada were designed to exclude or assimilate Indigenous learners. While many institutions have introduced programs to promote Indigenous student inclusion, or strategic enrolment management plans intended increase the number of Indigenous learners on a campus, there remains a sense of conditionality and otherness that underpins these efforts. Often plans do not go far enough in increasing programming and supports that are specific to Indigenous students. Programmatic operations intended to address diversity often reinforce institutional whiteness (Ahmed, 2012; Stein, 2020): "if Indigenisation is framed as a form of inclusion, then those who are 'being included' still remain objects of difference that are being invited into the institution by those who retain the power to make – or rescind, or deny – that invitation" (Stein, 2020, pp. 161-162).

This research is not intentionally designed to capture the unique and important experiences of Indigenous students who are new to the University of Victoria. This is a significant limitation of this study, and a necessary one to acknowledge. To effectively design research within Indigenous student contexts, a research methodology and methods must be designed with community input and assessed for cultural appropriateness and safety. It is essential that the University of Victoria continues to critically examine its relationship with Indigenous communities and how it serves and supports Indigenous learners. Given the knowledge, positionality, and resources available to the researcher it would be inappropriate to attempt to answer the question of how to best support the specific needs of Indigenous students during their first term of study within the scope of this project. Instead, this report will speak to the Indigenous student experience based on findings from the literature and student survey with full acknowledgement that these methods of research do not appropriately seek information and knowledge in an Indigenous learning context, and identify considerations for further research and consultation.

This study is further limited in its ability to address the depth of the unique experiences of international students. At the time of this report submission, international students are experiencing a variety of structural and operational barriers and challenges in accessing academic, social, wellbeing, and equity support at UVic. Navigating the changing global climate and local/institutional public health policies is difficult – the situation is extremely emergent and impactful for international students in various ways. Many international students are currently uncertain about their ability to travel and their living situation when they arrive. This research project has attempted to mitigate this limitation somewhat through selecting research participants in proportion to the ratio of international students and domestic students enrolled in their first year of studies, thus ensuring that a representative section of the international student population is surveyed.

This report addresses the research question by engaging voices of new University of Victoria students who have completed at least one full term of study, and no more than three full terms of study. Research participants entered post-secondary education for the first time in September 2021 or May 2021. Transfer students and new graduate students were not included in this study. The experiences of transfer students and graduate students are both identified suggested areas for future research. Indigenous students and international students were invited to participate in this research, and the limitations to assessing these student's unique experiences through this research method will be made clear within participant recruitment communications. This research focuses on the student experience from pre-Orientation (August 16, 2021) to the last day of classes completed at the time of survey completion.

2.0 Methodology and Methods:

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the way in which research was conducted for this report. As this research involved the collection of human data in the form of narratives from students, a Human Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval (Ethics Protocol Number 22-0053) was sought and granted on April 29, 2022. The methodology of this project is qualitative in nature and aims to identify key themes in effective peer mentor programs. These methods were selected to ensure a broad view of the topic as understood in the field, as well as a practical understanding of how this topic relates to the specific landscape of students at UVic.

I position myself, the researcher, as a white, cis-gender settler of European (Irish, Scottish) ancestry who is working to actively dismantle the colonial structures that exist within my analysis and worldview. As I conducted this research and authored this report, I have strived towards a methodology that challenges Eurocentric research methods and analytical narratives that can undermine community assets such as local knowledge or lived experiences, particularly of marginalized students.

2.1 Methodology

The methodology of research for this project takes a promising practices approach to the literature review, supported by a needs assessment approach to data collection. In community development work, a 'promising practice' is an intervention which is considered to have "sufficient evidence to claim that the practice is proven effective in achieving a specific aim or outcome, consistent with the goals and objectives of the activity or program. Ideally, promising practices demonstrate their effectiveness through the most rigorous scientific research, however there is not enough generalizable evidence to label them a 'best practice'" (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2013, p. 7). Given the fluid nature of UVic's campus culture and the changing dynamics posed by the public health situation, this approach respects the nuances, emergent trends, and changing needs seen within a community network. The literature review informed the development of an analytical framework by which the qualitative data was assessed. Qualitative data collected from first-year UVic students in a survey was thematically coded and analysed to identify what students think would make a peer-to-peer mentorship program meaningful, beneficial, and accessible. An asset-based community development (ABCD) approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) has been used to discuss the finding and develop recommendations for the client. An ABCD approach invites the client and researcher to consider recommendations that utilize existing knowledge, partnerships, and resources, and that acknowledge context-specific community values. This approach to discussing the findings is valuable for the client given the program development goal, strategic visioning, organizational values, and funding contexts that the Office of Student Life exists within. The Office of Student Life has stated that their priorities include "promoting an anti-oppressive, anti-racist campus environment" and providing "a student centred and trauma informed approach to student outreach and support" (UVic Office of Student Life, 2021, p. 3).

2.2 Methods:

Research has been conducted through a mixed methods approach.

2.2.a Literature Review

One method was a synthesis of literature on student engagement, student experience, and peer mentorship through a qualitative literature review. This literature review has led to the identification of student experience "domains" which have informed the analytical framework (see Figure 1). Further, the literature review has illuminated promising practices in these fields and has helped inform the survey questions that were asked to research participants. As the Office of Student Life is just beginning its first-year student experience programming efforts, the literature review within the report will offer a shared language and understanding of student experience grounded in evidence, which will benefit existing and future employees, volunteers, and program participants as they navigate how to best support students at the institution.

2.2.b Student Experience Survey

A second research method used was a survey completed by students.

The Office of Student Life facilitated communications to current first-year undergraduate students and invited them to participate in this research. The survey was offered to first-year undergraduates who completed at least two full terms of study at UVic, and no more than three full terms of study. The survey asked participants to identify key experience milestones within their first year, and to discuss factors that impacted their capacity to engage with all aspects of their student experience. The survey further asked students to speak from their experience and identify what factors they think would make a peer mentorship program feel meaningful, beneficial, and accessible for new students at UVic.

2.3 Survey Design and Distribution

Recruitment of Participants:

The invitation to participate in research (APPENDIX A) was distributed to all eligible UVic students on May 17th, 2022. The invitation included the intention for research, an overview of the participation recruitment process and expectations for participating, and explanation of the compensation for participating, dates that the survey would be opened and closed, the eligibility and ineligibility criteria for participation. This email also directed interested participants click an external link which took them to a survey (APPENDIX B) where they could express their interest in participating in research. The survey included a copy of the letter of informed consent and spaces for students to indicate their year/term of study at UVic, their student status (domestic, international, mature, graduate, transfer), their faculty, their email, and their permission to be contacted to participate.

The invitation to participate in research was sent to 3726 students who has recently completed their first year of studies at UVic. 194 students indicated that they would like to participate in research. From this pool, 100 students were selected. Participants were selected at proportionately to the ratio of first-year undergraduate students enrolled in each faculty. International and Domestic students were selected to represent a proportional enrollment within the first-year class. Within the limits of these two factors, participants were selected randomly.

Invited Participants	Faculty
7	Gustavson School of Business
2	Education
6	Human and Social Development
15	Engineering and Computer Science
6	Fine Arts
10	Humanities
23	Science
31	Social Science

Table 1: Participant invitations per faculty

Invited Participants	Student Status
11	International
89	Domestic

Table 2: Participant invitation by domestic or international student status

Data Collection:

100 selected participants were emailed the research questionnaire (APPENDIX C) survey on May 25, 2022. The survey was due to be completed at 11:59PM on June 1st, 2022. Participants

were sent reminder emails on May 30th, 2022 and June 1st 2022. 82 participants completed the survey.

Within the research questionnaire, participants were asked to optionally respond to some demographic questions regarding their race/ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual identity, and ability, which allowed for the survey data to be disaggregated to represent a range of different viewpoints and experiences. Research participants were informed that providing this information was optional, and that the purpose of collecting this data was equity seeking. This data was collected so that responses could be disaggregated to identify the unique knowledge held by students who experience barriers to equity – this way, the Office of Student Life can effectively design programs that support the needs of many different UVic students. "Disaggregation of data … is critical to help institutions of higher education attempt to ascertain the extent to which, not only the student population as a whole is achieving … outcomes through engaging in specific behaviours, but also the degree to which such achievement is being attained by various student subgroups" (Rawls & Hammons, 2015, p. 71). Through the assessment of this student demographic information this researcher can offer group-specific recommendations and areas for further research within this report in ways may be meaningful and relevant to the unique student experiences of equity seeking groups (Kodama & Dugan, 2013).

The Office of Student Life has provided funding to incentivise student participation in this research project. Each participant was offered a compensation of $10 of OneCard funds applied to their account for completing the survey. Participants were invited to a separate survey upon completing the research questionnaire to provide their email address and UVic Student ID (APPENDIX D). This ensured that identifying information was kept separate from survey responses.

Data Analysis:

Research participants provided written answers to 11 questions regarding their student experience. The responses were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify, analyse, organize, and report themes found within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed the framework proposed by Nowell et al. (2017) that promoted tools and practices to establish trustworthiness at each stage of analysis, grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006) method for linear – while being "iterative and reflective" -- thematic analysis structure, as well as Lincoln & Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness of research (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The phases of this framework include: the researcher familiarizing oneself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes from the data; reviewing themes; naming and defining themes; and finally producing the report (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 3). Using an inductive approach to the data, the thematic analysis – in conjunction to knowledge gained through the literature review - identified key themes to guide the report.

3.0 Literature Review:

3.1 Introduction

Literature reviewed for this research project included scholarly material related to the new student experience, student engagement, and peer mentorship programming in higher educational institutions. A breadth of peer-reviewed journals exists within these fields and many were accessed through the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC) database. Some key journals that were investigated include the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *Studies in Higher Education*, *Journal of College Student Development*, and *The Review of Higher Education*. Further, this research benefited from publications and resources from relevant professional organizations such as the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS), The Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (NODA), and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA).

Based on themes found in the survey data as well as themes found throughout the literature, four specific domains of the student experience within peer mentorship programing and they related to peer mentorship have been identified. These themes have built the structure of the analytical framework introduced at the end of this section. This review of the literature found that there are many scholarly sources that discuss student experience and factors that influence positive student outcomes for undergraduate learners. There are notably fewer academic studies that have looked specifically at the impact of peer mentorship programs on the student experience and positive student outcomes.

3.2 Review of Literature

Positive Student Outcomes

For the purpose of this report, positive student outcomes will be considered from both the institutional and individual learner perspective.

Institutionally, positive student outcomes include a student's academic participation, performance, and their persistence to graduation – commonly referred to as "retention" (Tinto, 1987). Further, some institutions may consider positive student outcomes in relation to factors that can influence their university's reputation and ranking – their "excellence" – particularly in areas of research/innovation, teaching quality, and career-readiness of graduates (Taylor & Braddock, 2007; Hazelkorn, 2011). These factors can influence the perception of quality or status for an institution, and therefore can attract students, recruit faculty and administrators,

secure funding opportunities, and bring potential donors (Grewal, Dearden, & Lilien, 2008; Polyakov, Bilozubenko, Korneyev, & Nebaba, 2020).

The seminal work of Dr. Vincent Tinto entitled *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (1987) is foundational in the study and practice of student affairs in Western contexts – particularly in the domains of student persistence, retention, and degree completion. Tinto proposes that a campus community can influence retention by creating a sense of belonging for students, faculty, and staff. Tinto suggests that institution should intentionally help students integrate both socially and academically by facilitating new student orientation programming, by providing additional support for students throughout their first year, and through fostering learning communities. As research in the student experience has grown in the decades following Tinto's original publication, it is further understood that institutional support of student wellbeing development (ie. through health promotion, spiritual care, etc.) and social justice and equity-seeking practices (ie. Services for students with a disability, transparent student conduct process, institutional fairness, community-lead diversity initiatives, etc.) -- lead to greater positive student outcomes for students and the institution (Stewart-Brown, et al., 2000; Dryer, 2018; Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006; Manalo, 2018; Ahmed, 2012).

Individually, each student develops personal hopes and expectations for their experience throughout their time at university – thus, positive student outcomes can be understood as the degree to which those hopes and expectations are realized. Though there are as many individual expectations for the university experience as there are students enrolled, studies have been able to identify particular trends and insights as to what the expectations of students will be over the coming decade. Through their extensive review of recent studies and their assessment on the impact of COVID-19 has been on the student experience, Shah, Pabel, and Richardson (2021) have shown an expectation of greater flexibility in all aspects of a student's learning journey. Some areas of expected flexibility include "timetabling … [and] the availability of online lectures, learning materials and assessment deadlines during the study period" (p.11). The expectation that students have of their instructors shows a hope for teachers to be 'real people' who they can connect with – less formal that the perception of a traditional professor-student hierarchy, more equipped with industry experience, willingness to show vulnerability and capacity for empathy, aware and responsive of diverse learning needs, and sensitive to students' cultures (Shah, Pabel, & Richardson, 2021; Cutri, Mena, & Feinauer Whiting, 2020; Krammer, Pflanzl, & Mayr, 2019; Arthur, 2017).

While students enjoy learning in ways that encourage interaction and socializing amongst one-another – and continue to highly value a sense of belonging at university and connection to other students – the online realities of the pandemic have made group-work challenging and a less-preferred method of assessment (Blackstein, Frederick, & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2020). Students hope for flexibility, proactivity, and intentionality for their learning assessment in general (Matthews & Cook-Sather, 2021), particularly "assessment deadlines and policies around

extensions and late submission; … assessment policies that are fair and equitable … [and] assessments with authentic design and relevance to the workplace" (Shah, Pabel, & Richardson, 2021, p. 13).

Regardless of what is happening within the classroom, students hope and expect their university to offer them personalized learning and support services (Shah, Pabel, & Richardson, 2021) – including career and employment support, disability and accessibility services (Dryer, 2018), cultural and identity supporting services (Ahmed, 2012; Lim & Tanaya, 2021), and support related to a students health and wellness (Bowden, Tickle, & Naumann, 2021; Williams, Pendlebury, Thomas, & Smith, 2017).

University administrators strive to increase positive student outcomes through a variety of services, programs, and interventions – however, there is not a perfect roadmap. In their extensive review of literature on the first-year student experience, Harvey, Drew & Smith (2006) conclude that "withdrawal is the result of a complex combination of student characteristics, external pressures and institution-related factors. Students' decisions to leave are often the result of a build-up of factors. (p. ii)"

The Landscape of the Student Experience and Engagement

The terms *student engagement* and the *student experience* are used frequently by student affairs practitioners within higher education settings – particularly in discussions about retention and undergraduate academic achievement – however they are the type of terms that can mean different things to different people (Kane & Williams, 2021). At a very general level, student experience refers to how every aspect of university participation and involvement is perceived, practiced, and valued by its students. Lewis (1984) suggests that it is "how students feel about being students, what is important to them, [and] what affects their progress" (p.1). It extends beyond the experience of being a learner in the classroom, and encompasses what Harvey et al. (1992) termed as the 'total student experience' – referring both to "the classroom experience and … to the institution as a whole, including student welfare and the general environment" (Kane & Williams, 2021, p. 32). The student experience matters, Lewis suggests, because students are the actors who are primarily affected by the decisions made by institutional leaders (Lewis, 1984).

Student engagement has also become, in some ways, a buzzword on higher education campuses. It is used frequently by both administrators and academic departments and is an often stated as an undefined goal of student-facing programs. In their review of student engagement literature, Bowden, Tickle, & Naumann (2021) strive to generally define the concept of student engagement by suggesting that the term refers to "an ecosystem of students, educators, service staff and institutions [interacting] to create enriching tertiary experiences" (p.1209). A more fulsome definition suggested in a modern student affairs context is offered by scholar Colin Bryson: "Student engagement is about what a student brings to higher education in terms of

goals, aspirations, values and beliefs and how these are shaped and mediated by their experience whilst a student…[it] is constructed and reconstructed through the lenses of the perceptions and identities held by students and the meanings and sense a student makes of their experiences" (Bryson, 2014, p. 17). Increasingly, the term student engagement is understood to describe a two-way relationship, or partnership, between the student and the university (Mossop & Lymn, 2021; Matthews & Cook-Sather, 2021)

The *first-year student experience* refers specifically to the unique experiences, challenges, and developmental potential of students as they begin their university journey (Schrader & Brown, 2008, pp. 310-315; 329-333). Depending on how an institution uses the phrase in context, it can encompass a broad group of learners: direct-from-secondary school students, transfer students, mature students or students who have taken time off between studies, visiting students, and exchange students. The first-year student experience is a primary indicator of retention within the institution, and students who have been traditionally underrepresented within higher education are particularly vulnerable to attrition within or following their first year (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005, p. 709; Kift, 2015, pp. 52-53). The first-year student experience can be represented through a lifecycle model – the developmental trends, milestones, and common experiences that unfold for new students in the weeks and months following a student's application, admission, orientation and attendance within the institution (Bowles, Fisher, McPhail, Rosenstreich, & Dobson, 2014).

Each student's experience is individual and is influenced by a number of personal, institutional, and external factors – homogeneity in this experience does not exist, and it is not a universal concept (Temple, Callender, Grove, & Kershe, 2014). In her critique of the way institutions highlight 'student experience' within their decision-making processes, Sabri (2011) states that "[while] 'the student experience' is firmly embedded at the centre of higher education policy discourse … both 'the student' and her 'experience' are shallow conceptions. Deploying 'the student experience' is nevertheless a powerful discursive move because it evokes radical reorientation, challenge to vested (academic) interests, consumer power and the quest for value for money" (p. 661). When the experience of all students is generalized, there is a significant risk that those who would not consider their experience to align with an institution's 'majority' – including those who have traditionally been marginalized, racialized, or disenfranchised -- become excluded from higher learning opportunities.

To truly attempt to provide meaningful service to *all* students at the institution, it is imperative that the concept of student engagement – and the understanding of barriers to engaging in one's university experience – are considered through a lens of equity, accessibility, and social justice. There are enduring systemic structures built upon the values of colonialism that underpin institutional behaviours and continue to influence the type of students a university and academic community favours and welcomes – which can lead to negative student outcomes for students who experience systemic oppression (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2010; O'Shea, 2016; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009; Yosso, 2005; Cabrera, 2014; Lee & Barnes,

2015). This research seeks to honour those experiences by valuing and centring lived-experience and recommending trauma-informed and culturally safe institutional interventions.

Student Experience - Current Issues

In a recent article that addresses impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student life, Kane and Williams (2021) poignantly state that "The student experience cannot be divorced from its wider context" (p. 31). The context of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact students and institutions, as do other current events and circumstances such as inflation, global conflict, civil unrest, and the climate crisis. While mindful of critiques from Sabri (2011) and other scholars who caution against the assumption of a universal student experience, Kane and Williams (2021) have analyses a wide body of data collected recently from North America, the UK, and Australia and posit the following areas as the six fundamental issues faced by contemporary students: Student financial position; concern for serious studying; time management; mental health; sexual harassment; personal progress. (p.38)

Financial Position: The cost of being a student is rising globally, and within Canada. At the beginning of the pandemic Statistics Canada reported that tuition fees were increasing across the country, and that 77% of students returning to post secondary studies were "very or extremely concerned" about their finances, with 46% concerned about their ability to pay tuition fees – even with the Canadian Emergency Student Benefit (Statistics Canada, 2020). As the pandemic continues rental housing availability and affordability for students at the University of Victoria continues to be a major concern, with the vacancy rate sitting at around 1% as of August 1st, 2022, and the average 1-bedroom apartment renting at more than $1,600 monthly – a 20% increase compared to the previous year (CBC News, 2022; The Martlet Student Newspaper, 2022). The lack of available and affordable housing within the private rental market has further impacted a sense of social isolation and stress amongst new students (Chwelos, 2021). More students are working part- or full- time while completing their studies (Shah, Pabel, & Richardson, 2021), with low-income working learners more likely to work longer hours, which may affect their grade (Carnevale & Smith, 2018).

Concerns For Serious Study: Based in their analysis of the data, students have demonstrated an increase for how 'seriously' they take their studies at an undergraduate level and are concerned about 'low contact hours' with their instructors (Kane & Williams, 2021).

Managing Time: According to Kane & Williams (2021) more students are reporting challenges with time management, and data suggests that many students exceed 40 hours a week on their studies and work. In general, time management has been seen by researchers as "amenable to improvement through well-designed interventions or contextual supports" (Wolters & Brady, 2021, p. 1320) however, this logic does not necessarily account for the lived-realities and

competing priorities of diverse students on a campus who may simply have 'more to manage' than their peers.

Mental Health: The issue of student mental health was identified as a concern well before the pandemic began, and it continues to be a pervasive problem and risk – with sometimes tragic ends – within university learning communities. One study found that on mid-sized Canadian campuses, such as UVic, frontline responders (ie. in residence services, campus health services, security services, frontline advising etc.) responded to approximately one suicide risk assessment for a student per week (Porter, 2018). In a study examining the effects of COVID-19 stressors on first-year student mental wellbeing, researchers noted significant increases in moderate-severe depression and anxiety symptoms amongst students – particularly for female students, gender diverse students, and queer students -- attributed to general difficulties associated with distanced learning as well experiences of social isolation (Fruehwirth, Biswas, & Perreira, 2021). The BC Centre for Disease Control reports that as the pandemic continues, students in BC feel less like they belong to their community and are experiencing higher levels of mental health-related challenges (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2021).

Sexualized Violence: Like mental health, the issue of sexualized violence within the university community has been an insidious problem on Canadian campuses. In line with a broader societal pattern following an experience of sexualized violence, these crimes are under-reported to authorities – often due to the assumption of negative responses like victim-blaming, denial of services, social consequences, or re-traumatization (Quinlan, Clarke, & Horsley, 2010; Lee & Wong, 2019). Based on a congruence of data from institutions across North America, researchers estimate that between 20%-25% of cis-female identifying students experience some form of sexualized violence by their final year of university (Lee & Wong, 2019; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2009). The impacts of sexualized violence can lead to a deterioration of mental wellbeing, negative physical health effects, and increased suicidal behaviour (Lee & Wong, 2019; Quinlan, Clarke, & Horsley, 2010). Further, survivors demonstrate higher rates of disengagement from university and poorer academic performance (Kammer-Kerwick, et al., 2021).

The current body of literature focuses heavily on the experiences of heterosexual and cis-gender students, while the experiences of queer, trans, and gender diverse students have been markedly understudied – however, this is a growing research area (Edwards, et al., 2015). In the research available, sexual minority students and gender diverse students are more likely to experience incidents of sexualized violence than their cis-gender and/or heterosexual classmates (Martin-Storey, Paquette, Bergeron, Castonguay-Khounsombath, & Prévost, 2022). Further, the health outcomes (PTSD and depression, physical health) and academic engagement outcomes (disengagement, feeling less safe on campus, a sense of 'institutional betrayal') for these students are even more prevalent and severe than for cis/het peers (Kammer-Kerwick, et al., 2021; Smith, Cunningham, & Freyd, 2016).

Personal Progression: Personal progression has traditionally been seen as an individual pursuit – the university was responsible for providing the education, and the learner was responsible for navigating any barriers they may encounter along the journey, and for finding real-world application for their degree upon graduation. However, as campus cultures evolve, there is increased momentum for universities to engage students as partners – both working towards shared goals through a "relational, capacity building ethos" – rather than as clients of an institution (Matthews & Cook-Sather, 2021, p. 108).

> "In particular, institutions have been expected to take more responsibility for graduate employment potential in recent decades, moving from a situation in which the study area was the focus to one in which transferable skills became more central. Similarly, it is now incumbent on institutions to take more care of how students from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups progress." (Kane & Williams, 2021, p. 42)

The student experience in relation to developing one's own identity as personal progress is not a new concept in student affairs practice and literature. The seminal work of Arthur Chickering (1969) is foundational to studies in student development. Chickering proposed "7 Vectors of Identity Development" – essentially, 'tasks' that a student must go through while developing their identity: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (e) establishing identity, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity. (Chickering A. W., 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Being a "student" is in-of-itself a definition of identity, and it emerges throughout the journey of moving into and through university study – first, as a 'new student' and then, by navigating new learning spaces, sharing knowledge, analysis and critiquing, and through the process of reflecting upon unfamiliar ideas and concepts (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). In the decades since Chickering's proposal scholars have speculated on what role the institution can and should play in supporting the identity development of its learners. The trend identified by Kane & Williams (2021) shows an even greater move towards institutional interventions in the areas of identity development. On campuses this is demonstrated at a general level with the growth of career coaching, advising, mentorship, and community development programming, whereas at a specific 'learner group' level this may appear as supportive programming for 'first generation' students, Students with Lived Experience in Care, IBPOC students, sexual- and gender- minority students, and students with disabilities.

In addition to Kane & William's (2021) findings, in Canada there is a growing trend towards integrating a lens of reconciliation, truth, and the disruption of colonial epistemologies, entomologies, and institutional structures which Canadian higher education have been built. Institutions are beginning to ask how Indigenous knowledge can be appropriately included, advanced, researched and shared within academic spaces and in community application (Battiste, 2018). However, through the practice of "Indigenization", many Indigenous scholars note that campuses are actually affirming Eurocentric superiorities – they are adding more Indigenous bodies to institutions but trying to develop, within these students, the capacity to perform in the

existing academic colonial structure (Battiste, 2018; Stein, 2020). In her poignant chapter entitled *Biting the University that Feeds Us*, Eve Tuck states "There are parts of the higher education project that are too invested in settler colonialism to be rescued. I offer that here as a truism ... There are parts of academic labour that might be refused in order to generate new possibilities: another truism" (Tuck, 2018, p. 149).

Institutional Responses and Promising Practices for Student Engagement and supporting the Student Experience

To support positive student outcomes for learners, institutions can create meaningful opportunities that enhance the student experience. Student engagement behaviours can be influenced by institutional interventions such as seminars, programs, teaching strategies, and the development of learning communities (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Further, intentional student engagement interventions can influence positive outcomes for students from diverse racial and ethnic identities, those with lower socioeconomic statuses, those who have experienced trauma, and students of other marginalized backgrounds who may face institutional and societal barriers to succeeding in higher education (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Jones & Nangah, 2021, pp. 66-68; Chang, Chang, & Ledesma, 2005, p. 15).

Peer mentorship as a promising practice for supporting students

When facilitated with intention and care, peer mentorship programing is a high-impact student engagement intervention (Kuh G. , 2008, p. 14; Wai-Ling Packard, 2018). Peer mentors offer guidance, encouragement, and support to new students. They utilize knowledge gained from both their lived- and shared-experience of being a new student within a particular field of study or identity group, and from participating in a mentorship skills training program. Successful peer mentorship programs have demonstrated a correlation between new-student participation and satisfaction with the university community, feelings of confidence and university acumen, and intention to graduate (Sanchez, Bauer, & Paronto, 2006, p. 34; Snowden & Hardy, 2012, p. 85). Further, it is widely understood that peer connection outside of the classroom – though participation in co-curricular activities such as mentorship, clubs and course unions, student government, and other student-centred networks – is correlated to positive academic and social integration within the institution and overall student wellbeing (Williams, Pendlebury, Thomas, & Smith, 2017, p. 1719; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Tinto, 1987)

However, not all peer mentorship programs are equal or without challenges. Without intentional program design, mentor selection and training, supervision, communication, accountability and oversight peer mentorship can have a minimal – or even negative – impact on the new student experience (Sanchez, Bauer, & Paronto, 2006; Lefera & Swart, 2020, pp. 2-5). Challenges can also arise when there in a lack of clarity of boundaries and expectations within

the mentoring relationship, and when there is simply not strong compatibility between a mentor and mentee (Cantalini-Williams, et al., 2014, pp. 17-20). Additionally, mentors themselves may experience challenging emotional reactions and disappointment when an absence of a meaningful relationship develops between themselves and a program-participant (Seery, Andres, Moore-Cherry, & O'Sullivan, 2021). Expectations need to be clarified between the mentor and mentee and support should be offered from the institutional staff throughout the course of a formal mentorship relationship.

Peer mentoring at the undergraduate level usually involves upper-year undergraduate students (year 2, 3, and 4+) supporting incoming first-year undergraduates, relying on the experience they gained through recently being in similar circumstances that new students may be struggling with (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014). Mentoring relationships are characterized by "reciprocity, developmental benefits, and regular/consistent interactions over some period of time" between individuals with varying levels of expertise (Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011, p. 292).

While the focus of this report is on positive student outcome for peer mentorship program-participants, it is relevant to note that the upper-year mentors also demonstrate positive student outcomes through participating in these programs. By participating in mentorship training and the ongoing delivery of mentorship programming, researchers found that "peer mentors developed new skills and relationships; their friendships and networks significantly expanded; [and participation] …offered an important opportunity to work in a collaborative way with other students, faculty and staff" (Seery, Andres, Moore-Cherry, & O'Sullivan, 2021, p. 677)

Students who participate in peer mentorship programs demonstrate higher rates of participation and engagement within their overall university experience. This can be attributed to mentorship factors of receiving "support" and "earlier engagement with the academic community" (Snowden & Hardy, 2012, p. 82). Some literature suggests that it is particularly impactful when the peer mentoring relationship begins within the first few days of university, as mentors are able to introduce new students to the campus environment and help a sense of social connectedness amongst students (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014). A student's experience of social connectedness or, on the other hand, their experience of social isolation can impact their overall academic performance, learning outcomes, and motivation to persist throughout their time in university (Allens, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2008). Further, Tinto (1987) suggests that some student's withdrawal decision is consolidated within the first few days of attendance – and that this decision is mostly predicted by levels of social and academic integration.

Snowden and Hardy's (2012) and Campbell and Campbell's (2007) extensive studies on the impact of peer mentorship programming -- both on student participants and student mentors -- demonstrated positive student outcomes for all involved. In particular, their findings suggested that through participating in the peer mentorship process both the mentor and mentee saw an

improvement in assessed academic performance compared to peers who did not participate in the mentorship program. Program participants may demonstrate greater motivation to engage with their subject, feel a higher sense of comfort in their classes, and have higher 'aspirations' for themselves than those who have not been mentored (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Snowden & Hardy, 2012)

Peer mentorship programming has the potential to influence positive wellbeing outcomes for students as well. As mentioned earlier in this exploration of literature, mental health is a growing concern within the university experience. Participating in a peer mentoring process has demonstrated a positive influence on promoting their confidence and self-belief, and reducing feelings of stress and anxiety for both mentors and program-participants (Snowden & Hardy, 2012). In Collings, Swanson, and Watkin's (2014) longitudinal study that took place over the course of one academic year, the researchers demonstrated that students who participated in a peer mentorship program experienced much higher levels of self-esteem and an overall more positive "affect" (which assessed participants overall attitude towards their current life situation) than non-peer mentored students. Further, non-peer mentored students were "four times more likely to demonstrate serious thoughts of withdrawal from university" than peer mentored students (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014, pp. 938-939).

Further highlighting the value of connecting over a shared lived-experience, peer mentorship programming has been shown to offer positive student outcomes for racialized students -- it has demonstrated a positive impact on both identity development and the development of a social-support network amongst students (Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000). When program-participants were matched with peer mentors of the same ethnicity, they demonstrated "a higher cumulative GPA and graduation rate and also entered graduate study at a higher rate" (Campbell & Campbell, 2007, p. 135). Peer mentoring has also been demonstrated to support positive student outcomes of students who may experience barriers to accessibility and inclusion. For example, peer mentoring can be particularly supportive for students on the autism spectrum, as it allows for flexibility around addressing individualized needs and creates spaces where students can receive support with their transition to university, managing their academic work, communicating their support needs, providing emotional fulfillment, and influencing social connection (Siew, Mazzucchelli, Rooney, & Girdler, 2017)

Due to the conditions of the pandemic, as well as increased demand for flexible access to university services (Kayyali, 2020), virtual options for participating in mentorship programs are becoming more desirable. There are benefits for both mentors and mentees, as "e-mentored relationships offer objectivity, distance, and scheduling and topic flexibility, as well as a heightened informality absent in face-to-face mentoring experiences." (Schuman, Fields, Parekh, Woody, & Miller, 2021, p. 43). Additionally,

> "…increased potential for the development of informal, casual relationships between mentor and mentee in e-mentoring could potentially interfere with other important goals,

> such as skills development. In addition, the lack of adequate administrative and technological support for students to fully take advantage of e-mentoring could adversely impact the mentoring relationship. Another important concern is the risk of misunderstandings inherent in written forms of communication, particularly e-mail" (Schuman, Fields, Parekh, Woody, & Miller, 2021, pp. 43-44).

This caution once again suggests the importance of program structure and the clarity of expectations early in the program for both mentors and mentees.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework (fig. 1) proposed for this project centres the expected findings of the research questions ("how peer-to-peer mentorship programs can support positive student outcomes") and organizes these findings into the following "student experience domains": social; academic; wellbeing; and 'equity, diversity and accessibility'. This analytical framework is grounded in Tinto's (1975; 1987) work in understanding factors that influence student transition and/or attrition in higher education. Lakhal et al. (2020) summarize Tinto to explain that "Academic integration is defined by students' academic performance, level of intellectual development, and perception of having a positive experience in academic settings, while social integration is defined by involvement in extracurricular activities and the presence of positive relationships with peers" (p. 4). As demonstrated through the literature, these positive experiences have a direct correlation to continued positive student outcomes for both the individual and the institution.

Further to Tinto's understanding of the student experience, this framework acknowledges the 'wellbeing experiences' and the 'equity, diversity, and accessibility experiences', as distinct to those of social connectedness and academic performance. This proposed analytical framework defines the domain of wellbeing experience to include personal health, overall sense of wellness, their capacity to meet their needs (including financial capacity), and their ability to cope with, manage, and persist given the stressors they face. The domain of 'equity, diversity, and accessibility' includes a student's experiences of fairness, inclusion, equity, safety & security (including cultural-safety, safety from violence, etc.), accessibility, and systemic oppression within their university experience.

Of course, the social, academic, wellbeing, and equity domains of a student's experience are often interconnected. Tinto (1975; 1987) explains that factors from these domains can influence one another – for example, if a student is struggling academically they may not feel able to make time for social activities and/or may decrease their physical movement and other wellbeing practices. A student experiencing barriers to equity may feel unsafe accessing particular support services offered by the institution, which can lead to a lack of wellness capacity, social engagement, and academic performance – particularly when assessed against

peers who were able to access support without barriers. Further, this framework is intended to respect that there are several factors that impact a student's experience in these domains that go well beyond the scope of institutional influence – the framework strives to illustrate the interconnected and holistic nature of the individual experience.

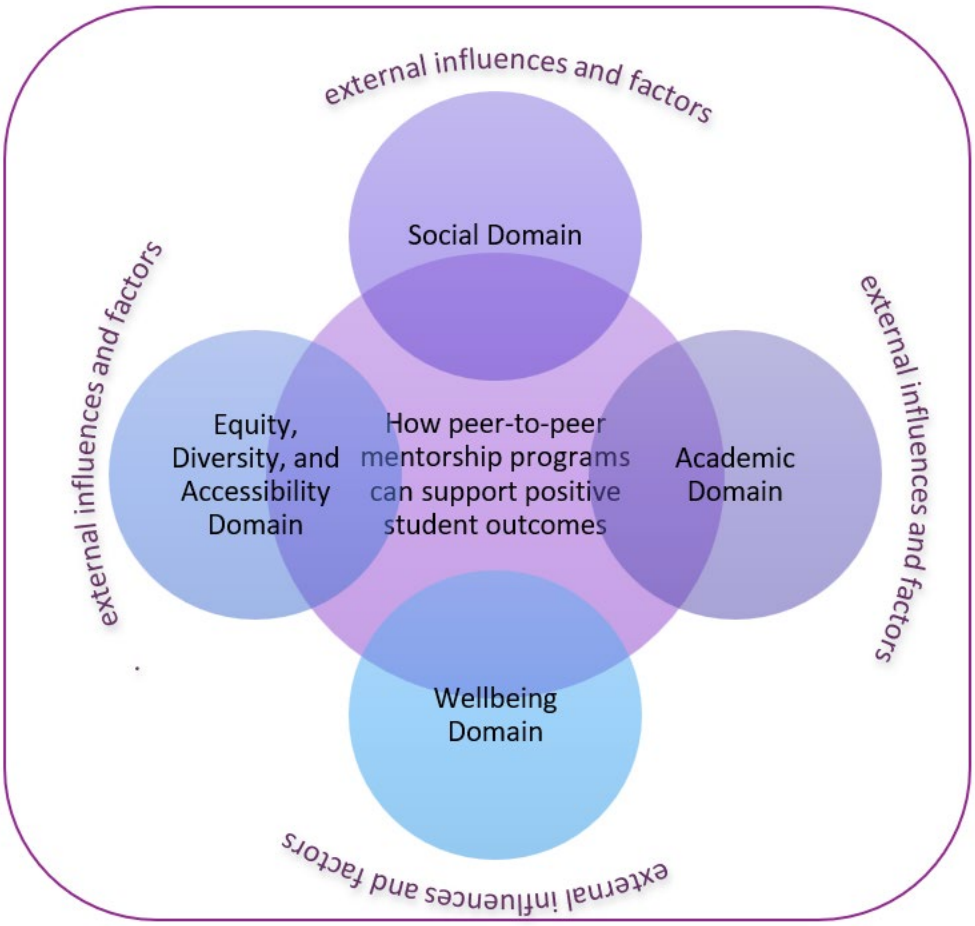

Figure 1: Analytical Framework
This framework references Tinto's (1975; 1987) concepts of social and academic integration as relevant to supporting positive student outcomes.

4.0 Survey Findings:

4.1 Introduction

In this section, findings from the student survey are thematically organized within the four proposed student experience domains: social, academic, wellbeing, and 'equity, diversity, and accessibility'. The survey was offered to 100 eligible student participants and 82 participants completed the survey in full. 11 short answer questions were asked (10 required, 1 optional). The survey questionnaire asked participants to write in sentences/paragraphs, or 'jot points'. They were asked to provide a minimum number of thoughts for each section and given the option to provide more than that if they wanted to. The survey was organized into four sections: Reflect; Identify; Imagine; and Looking Forward.

4.2 Thematic Analysis

Section 1: Reflect

In this section survey participants were asked to reflect on their thoughts and feelings before they began their studies at UVic. They were asked to identify expectations, hopes, fears and concerns they had about their upcoming university experience.

Social Domain: Participants reported that they expected to meet friends, form social connections, and participate in their community and "university life".

> *"I expected to have the typical "movie" experience. I expected crazy people rallies, school spirit, lifelong friends, and wild parties."*

> *"I expected that I would have a large community of friends/classmates to talk to"*

The participants primarily expressed significant hopes for social connections, building new friendships, and forming meaningful relationships. Further, participants reported a hope to participate in the university community, meet like-minded people, and experience a 'sense of belonging' at UVic.

> *"I hoped to meet some like-minded and driven students both within my own faculty and at the university in general."*

> *"For the most part, I hoped to feel like I belonged. I hoped I could make connections that would help me throughout my first year and even further than that."*

> *"I hoped to make friends and connect with my local community. I hoped to get involved in extra curricular and develop interest in my field."*

Over half of the participants reported a fear of being lonely and not making new friends. This often looked like a fear of not 'fitting in', not finding people who accepted them, and not effectively 'putting themselves out there'. Some participants indicated that their fears and concerns were grounded in expecting rejection or challenge because of their identity, ability, or lived experience. It is important to note that all the students who identified concerns around building relationships or participating in the community still expressed a desire to form these social connections.

> *"I expected to feel out of place considering I was a mature student"*
>
> *"Some expectations that I held before I came to UVic were mostly related to my social well being. I thought I'd feel out of place, have a hard time making friends [and not understand] lectures as there is a different type of academic standing when you are an international student"*
>
> *"I expected to face barriers to accessibility... I expected to have difficulties with social situations."*

Students identified hopes and fears around their housing/living situation. Many students expressed both excitement about the experience, but anxiety or concern about whether they would get along with their dorm-mates and roommates. Students who did not get into UVic Campus housing identified concerns about making friends while they were living off campus, and missing out on a hoped-for experience of living in dorms.

> *"I lived in res my first year with three roommates I'd never met before so I … hoped to have a welcoming, comfortable, and friendly home space on campus."*
>
> *"I was … nervous entering cluster [student housing] as it was the first time for me sharing living space (with non family members) for a long period of time."*
>
> *[I was afraid] … that I wouldn't like living off campus and would feel separated from the rest of first years who lived on campus.*
>
> *"I was worried that my cluster house would be packed with partiers and I wouldn't like living on campus."*
>
> *"I was concerned that my landlord would cause problems."*

Finally, some students expressed a fear that they would not receive support at UVic. Beyond feeling a sense of isolation or loneliness, these students reported concern that they would fall between the cracks and not be able to access help.

> *"I was worried about moving away from my support systems. This was a fear of mine especially in the first few weeks of university when the change of leaving home for a new city was still fresh."*

"I was nervous that seeking out support would be really hard because the resources don't feel as easy to find as they were in high school, and in high school you had teachers you could talk to and would check in on you."

Academic Domain: Participants reported that they anticipated classes and coursework to be more challenging than what they had faced before; that they would enjoy what they were learning and that it would be engaging for them; that they would spend a significant amount of time studying outside of class; and that professors, faculty, and university administration might be inaccessible or 'uncaring' towards them as individuals.

Participants reported mixed expectations for their academic performance. While some anticipated that they would not achieve high grades similar to those they achieved in secondary school, others expected a high level of academic performance and recognition from themselves. Frequently, students who reported that they had high expectations for their academic performance also expressed that these expectations were not met.

"[I expected] the workload was going to be heavier than high school - I would probably have less time to do the things I like because I have commitments to studying/school [and] my grades were going to drop substantially compared to high school grades."

"Expectations I had was that it would be easy to get high Grades like high school and that the exams would be way easier."

"Some expectations I had were to get straight A's … I also had the expectation that I would have an easy time adjusting."

Some students expected instructors and professors would be distant and unsupportive. Of these students, some reported that they were surprised to find their instructors more supportive than expected.

"Before beginning my studies at UVic some expectations I had were that my professors were going to be very strict and hard to get help from."

"I expected professors to be very closed off and heard to reach, teachers in High school proclaimed that professors were rude and not willing to help which is just not true."

Aligned with findings within the social domain, participants identified a hope to connect with academic peers including other students in their faculty/area-of-study, and their professors.

"I'd hoped [for] opportunities for other marine biology students to meet one another and learn more about what it's like in that area of study"

"I hoped that I would make new friends in my courses."

"I hoped that I would be able to study with my friends attending university, and meet new people through classes."

"[I hoped] for a good professor that cares about student and teaches well."

Unsurprisingly, participants reported that their primary hopes within the academic domain of the student experience were to learn and succeed.

"I had hoped to be successful and get As in all of my classes. I had hoped to have fun in school."

"I hoped that I could understand and [keep] up with my lectures."

"I hoped that I would enjoy and learn from my classes."

In direct correlation with these hopes, participants reported that their primary fear and concern for their academic experience was failure, not succeeding in classes, and being unable to cope/overwhelmed with the workload expected of them. Often participants identified a fear that they, specifically, were not going to be capable of coping and adapting to these new expectations. This fear of personal failure overlaps with findings within the wellbeing domain of the student experience.

"One concern I had going into first year was that the university course load would be too much to handle."

"I was worried that my high school experience wouldn't be enough to let me succeed at university."

"I worried about failing a class and falling behind in getting my degree."

"I had feared that I would be overwhelmed with school work … I had also a lot of concerns surrounding the amount of new things I'd have to learn."

"I was scared that I would fall behind in my classes, feel inferior to my classmates, and even be socially isolated."

Some participants noted concerns around their ability to preform directly related to conditions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I feared the classes would have additional work then usual due to classes being partially online and teachers not being able to test as easily."

"I feared that the pandemic had taken away opportunities to gain some experience in my field and that I would be lacking in comparison to my peers."

"I was concerned about the uncertainty of the pandemic and how it could effect my studies."

Finally, some participants reported concerns with not enjoying their area of study and lacking the motivation to persist in their coursework.

"I was concerned about having the motivation to complete my assignments on time, and I was concerned about not knowing anyone in my new classes."

"I feared that I would dislike my major and that I might not succeed academically"

Wellbeing Domain: When considering how their first-year UVic experience would impact their wellbeing, participants expected that they would experience some level of transitional stress as they navigated their university experience.

"I ... expected to need some time to adapt to life away from home and entire independence with how I chose to spend my time and energy."

"I expected to feel out of my depth and to be faced with a difficult adjustment period. I expected that it would be very different from high school both socially and academically."

Participants also identified that they expected to develop a sense of direction and purpose. Further, participants reported an expectation of developing a sense of independence and personal growth/development.

"I expected myself to become a more independent and mature individual by attending my first year at university. I also believed that I would get a clearer idea of what I wanted to do with my life by exploring my chosen program."

"I expected to educate myself not only in the classroom but by my new independence and surroundings."

Further, some participants indicated that they expected they would be able to access or receive wellbeing support within the university community.

"I expected to feel overwhelmed by chores, food, laundry, etc. since I would not have my family with me -I was expecting to use many avenues of support at UVic for my mental, physical, and academic success."

"I also expected ... mental health support."

Similar to findings around expectations for wellbeing, participants reported hopes around developing their sense of individual purpose and direction and establishing a sense of

independence and personal competence. Some students reported a hope for a "fresh start" or an opportunity to have a more positive wellbeing experience.

> *"I hoped that I would discover what subject I was passionate about and what goals I wanted to pursue in the future based on what I enjoyed learning about."*

> *"I hoped this experience would help me figure out what I wanted to do with my life as an adult and figure out who I want to be as a person."*

> *"I had hoped I would thrive in a way I hadn't in high school"*

Additionally, participants reported a hope to live in a 'healthy' way and in an environment that promoted their wellbeing. They identified a hope for experiencing the natural environment around Vancouver Island, and for developing an appreciation of the City of Victoria.

> *" I hoped to love then environment of the campus. I hoped to get outside and explore the area."*

The primary fears or concerns that participants reported were around experiencing personal failure to cope with the expectations of university or independent living, and "burning out".

> *"I experienced some concerns about moving away from my family. I have young siblings and was worried about missing out on them growing up. I was also concerned about my ability to handle my new responsibilities as a young adult living by myself for the first time. these concerns were mostly surrounding time management."*

> *"I was really worried that I wouldn't be able to do it and that I would have to drop out."*

> *"I worried that I would not be able to keep up with the workload. I also worried that I wouldn't be able to live independently."*

> *"I was worried about whether I would be able to complete the course work, and feared the idea of being more reliant on myself."*

Some students identified concerns with their financial situation. Apprehension about taking on student loans and fear of losing a scholarship due to poor academic performance were specific financial themes identified.

> *"I was concerned about the cost of schooling and not wanting to go into debt by taking out student loans."*

> *"I was scared I would lose my scholarship if my grades weren't good enough."*

Finally, some participants indicated that they were concerned about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their wellbeing. Specifically, they were concerned about the potential of

experiencing isolation/lockdowns and the resulting impact on their mental health, COVID safety on campus, and contracting COVID-19 while at UVic.

> *"[I was] concerned with COVID [and] how in person activities would be (social events, lectures, rallies, clubs, restaurants, etc.) as I am a very sociable person, and need these sort of interactions for normalcy. I was afraid of COVID getting worse and things being put completely online."*

> *"[I had] pandemic fears, more so that we would go back into a lockdown, which was horrible for my mental health in the past."*

> *"I was extremely concerned about COVID and how well students and faculty would be following masking rules as well as being vaccinated."*

Equity, Diversity & Accessibility: Some participants reported that they had expectations, hopes, and fears around their experience of equity (including discrimination and safety concerns), representation and diversity, accessibility, and barriers they might encounter because of their identity or ability.

Generally, participants expected UVic to be a welcoming community that supported a diverse group of students, including students from equity-seeking groups.

> *"I expected inclusivity and activism around marginalized groups from the university, not just the students."*

> *"I expected to have a diverse and supportive environment. I expected to face barriers to accessibility."*

> *"[I expected] that UVIC would be more trans-inclusive."*

> *"I expected I would see a lot more activism on the school's regarding racial representation and awareness."*

Participants reported hoping that they would be accepted within the university community. Participants further reported feeling afraid of experiencing discrimination on campus.

> *"I hoped that I would explore my sexuality and gender identity."*

> *"I hoped to find people who would love and accept me."*

> *"I hoped that I would not be singled out for my age."*

"I was afraid that I would face accessibility barriers and have difficulties with administrative staff. I was worried that I would be discriminated against. I was worried that the accessibility barriers would be enough to force me to leave academia."

"I was afraid that I made the wrong decision by going back to school at nearly 50 years old. I was afraid of feeling like an outsider or unwelcome. I was afraid of feeling stupid or incapable."

Some participants identified concerns around violence and gender-based discrimination.

"[I was] worried about safety, more specifically the type of people I would encounter on campus late at night."

"I would be mistreated by males within my faculty."

Section 2: Identify

In this section participants were asked to reflect on their lived experience of being a UVic student so far, and to note impactful events, moments, or experiences. Specifically, participants were asked to identify "high points" and "low points" throughout their first year at UVic. A "high point" was defined as an experience that they would consider positive. This could include movement towards their personal and academic goals, achievements, connections and relationships, or opportunities. A "low point" was defined as an experience they would consider negative. This could include experiences that set them back from their personal or academic goals, unwanted academic outcomes, unmet hopes or expectations, or realized fears.

Social Domain: High points within this domain trended towards connections/friendships, participating in campus life, and having a positive housing experience.

Participants primarily reported that forming connections with others at university, making friends, and meeting 'like-minded' people were high points in their first-year experience.

"At the beginning of the year, I made new friends. I didn't think I would, but them making an effort to talk to me was very helpful. It takes a lot out of a person with social anxiety to make friends, but I did and I don't regret it."

[My high point was] becoming friends with someone in my human anatomy lab who I am now going to move in with for the upcoming school year.

[One of my high points was] meeting and solidifying my new friend group in around late September. These friends have supported me a great deal throughout my first year and varsity."

Some participants living in UVic student housing reported that they had a positive experience in the dorms leading to a high point of their year.

> *"My first high point of the year occurred when I first moved into my varsity res. I was living with three people I'd never met before but we all quickly became friends and became very close as the year progressed."*

> *"My highest point of this year was living in residence. I lived in south tower and my floor had such a tight knit group of people that were always willing to support and help each other out. Some of the closest friends I made were from my residence and it was so nice to be around them all the time."*

Finally, participants reported that participating in campus community life was a high point for them. Participants identified specific engagement programs/university events offered by various UVic departments, student clubs and course unions, and varsity and intermural sports.

> *"I joined Global Community and did make a lot of friends. I'm glad I was joining that."*

> *"Being able to attend activities/events within my faculty and join a club within my faculty that allowed me to make connections… Attending orientation events at the beginning of the year that allowed me to meet people which made me less nervous to start the semester."*

> *"Visiting the Pet Cafe at the multifaith centre. Seeing all the dogs and chatting with people really helped me de-stress. Hiking up Mount Tolmie with the Student Connect program and getting to meet my Engage Leader in person."*

> *"I enjoyed participating in all the fun, impromptu activities offered in the quad throughout the year. Some of them were games that fundraised for events or information booths etc., but it made me realize how diverse UVic was in the school was involved in."*

Low points within the social domain of the student experience trended towards feelings of loneliness, challenges making friends, challenges with relationships, homesickness, and negative housing experiences.

Participants identified feeling lonely and/or homesick as contributing to their primary social "low point" throughout the year. While some students expressed that they eventually made friends later in the first semester, others reported that after the first few weeks it felt more difficult to meet people.

> *"[In] January I did not want to go back to school, my first semester had been incredibly stressful and I hadn't made any friends so I spent my winter break dreading returning to classes."*

"I didn't make many new friends through UVIC because I'm not great at putting myself out there … [I felt] homesick because I didn't have much to do"

"I struggled to make friends in the first semester and spent most of my time going to class, studying and doing stuff by myself."

"[my low points was] the beginning of the first semester where I didn't have any friends and I missed home and felt out of place."

Additionally, participants reported challenges with their interpersonal relationships – both newly formed at UVic, and external to UVic – as low points during their first year.

"My new roommate moved in second semester and her and another roommate of mine made me feel very left out of stuff. they wouldn't really invite me out to places with them which sucked [because] I had to live with them."

"Another low point was during October because I lost my entire circle of close friends and was feeling very alone and isolated which made it harder for me to complete assignments."

"[my low point was] the drama that comes with meeting a lot of new people and having to deal with that."

"I wasn't happy sometimes about my relationship (it's a long distance) and this affects my mood and mind a lot. [I] got homesick sometimes."

Finally, participants identified negative housing experiences as being low points during their first year. These experiences included challenging roommate dynamics, dissatisfaction with campus housing, and the experience of living off campus.

"[A low point was] not getting to live on residence, [and] not being able to make as many friends

"The partying at Halloween … made me feel unsafe on campus."

"Residence being loud, hard, and judgemental."

"My stuff was stolen by one of my roommates."

Academic Domain: <u>High points</u> reported by participants that have been assessed as part of the academic domain of the student experience include: succeeding/achieving academically, enjoying the learning environment and the subject, and making connections with academic peers and instructors.

Participants reported that their primary high points throughout the year were around succeeding in their courses. This included achieving high grades, feeling a sense of accomplishment and/or

pride in their work, feeling competent and effective, and overcoming challenges (ie. working hard to 'pull up' a grade, doing better than expected, etc.).

> *"[A] high point was at the end of my first year (April) because I realized that I got good grades in all my courses throughout the year and I was proud of myself. Another high point was at the end of my first semester (December) I got an almost perfect score on my final and I felt really really good about myself."*

> *"Getting my grades back at the end of term 2 and realizing I'd passed all my courses - exam season of term 2, as I felt my studying strategies were radically more effective which allowed me more time to relax."*

> *"Going into university I found my weakness being writing. In my [specific class] we were to write primarily essays to be graded. On the essay worth 30% [I] scored and 85 which is a tremendous achievement for me."*

Participants reported different aspects of "learning" as high points experience throughout the year, including a sense of enjoyment in their course material, feeling like they were gaining knowledge, and having enriching classroom/lecture/laboratory experiences.

> *"[A] high point included beginning my first [specific course] …This allowed me the insight into finalising, at least for now, what I hope to do with my life and what I wish you pursue as my career."*

> *"In first semester, majority of my classes allowed me to conduct research on topics I wanted to know more about, allowing [sic] me to really strengthen my education."*

> *"I had an amazing time in my first term [specific course] lab, it made me learn that I do love biology and when I was put in group, I enjoyed their company and team efforts made to finish the assignment."*

> *"Being able to start conversations with people in [specific course] and feeling a part of that class was a real high point. I very much became engaged and interested in [program] unexpectedly. This took a while though and the course was a year long which was really useful in giving people time to relax and connect."*

Finally, participants reported high points around making academic connections. These connections included meeting other students who were interested in the same subjects/area of study as them, attending course/program related extra-curricular activities and events, making friends in class, having enriching group-work experiences, and having positive connections with instructors and TAs.

> *"Making personal connections with students and my professor in my first semester gender studies classes. The space was extremely inclusive and welcoming."*

"To be honest, my favorite moments of first year were the late nights spent studying/working on labs with my friends."

"In the first and second semester going to office hours were always a high point. Talking with the profs one on one (and TAs as well) always made me feel competent and supported"

"The [program course union] initial … group get together was a great ice breaker for the program and to meet new people in the school"

"In the springtime, I connected with one of the professors in the Faculty of Science about potentially getting involved with their research lab. I was able to start researching with them this summer term and this was a 'high point' because I am enjoying getting hands-on experience and a have a better idea of what I might want to do with my degree."

"[high points included] meeting my amazing professors, loving learning about child and youth care, enjoying school for the first time."

Low points reported by participants within the academic domain of the student experience include failure or not meeting their own expectations, the experience of testing and exams, a negative classroom or instructor experience, difficulties managing their academic workload, and experiencing a sense of discouragement and lack of motivation to persist.

Academic failure and not preforming as hoped were the primary low points that participants identified in this domain.

"Failing a class was hard to come to terms with and ineffective studying lead to late nights that were very hard."

"In the first semester (November ish),I received a mark in the 60s on a paper which I thought I truly understood. This was a failing of my own standards and expectations."

Experiencing academic challenges or stressors, such as a sense of overwhelm, feeling like they were not able to effectively manage their time, and not having the personal or intellectual capacity to succeed in their course was also a key theme. In particular, low points peaked for many students in the lead up to mid-term and final examinations. Some students expressed that they did not to know to properly prepare to be evaluated at the university level. Many students expressed that their personal wellbeing suffered as a result of stress and feeling overwhelmed.

"[*my low points included] receiving a very low midterm mark in one of my classes during the beginning of second semester … [Also] trying to get used to the transition from tests in high school to exams in university."*

"[my low point was] finals period. I felt that I was overwhelmed with work and could not take care of myself properly."

"[My lowest point was] definitely midterm season in semester 2 (around February) I had so many midterms and huge assignments to get done and it was really really overwhelming. Most of my low points would be on those weeks where most of my classes would have a big assignment or test on the same week, I just didn't have time to do things for myself or else I felt like I was sacrificing my grade."

Some participants reported having negative classroom experiences, including poor group-work experiences and negative interactions with instructors. However, notably, more students reported group-work and professor interactions as a high point.

"[I had] difficulty … reaching certain teachers throughout my first semester, it made it hard to ask questions that should be essential to succeed in the class."

"My first chemistry lab was extremely stressful and scary. It was confusing and the TAs and laboratory instructors made it so much more intense than it needed to be. I ended the lab crying because I messed up the submission file because I was so stressed from the lab environment."

Students reported feeling discouraged by negative academic experiences such as failure or challenging workloads. This impacted their sense of purpose and their commitment and persistence to continue their studies.

I *knew my classes would be a lot more difficult than high school but I didn't know they would be this hard. I felt like all I had time for was school and studying and that definitely took at toll on my mental health. On top of that, when all of my studying only ever got me barely passing it was extremely discouraging and made me feel like my best was never enough.*

I only scored 45% on my first physics midterm in the second semester which was very stressful and made me consider dropping the course.

Finally, some students reported feeling negatively impacted at the beginning of the January 2022 semester when they unexpectedly began the term virtually due to the conditions of COVID-19.

"When school was online in second term, and I didn't know when I would be moving back or if I would be staying at home and was stuck in limbo."

"[I was] conflicted about returning to school for the second term when it was announced that the first two weeks of classes would be delivered online."

"Classes were online for 2 weeks which set me back right from the beginning of the term."

Wellbeing domain: High points reported by participants that fall within the wellbeing domain of the student experience include appreciating the natural environment and exploring the city of

Victoria, discovering a sense of direction or purpose, experiencing a feeling of independence and personal development, and having positive experiences when accessing support services.

Many students expressed a sense of appreciation and connection to the physical environment, UVic campus and the surrounding community of Greater Victoria. This was the primary high point identified by students in the wellbeing domain.

> *"[a high point was] going down to the beach and exploring Victoria"*
>
> *"Going on walks with friends around ring road or in mystic vale."*
>
> *"Some high points this year were … getting to go surfing for the first and second time in Tofino"*
>
> *"A high point this year was having great roommates and hiking mount Tolmie frequently"*

Additionally, participants reported the experience of personal growth as a wellbeing high point. Some students expressed that by participating in their first year they had developed a greater understanding of what they wanted to do with their lives.

> *"My CSC courses and my outcome with them helped me solidify my want to go into the field, which I found immensely satisfying."*
>
> *"[I enjoyed] having the ability to create my own schedule and arrange my classes."*
>
> *"Moving to Canada has completely changed my life for the better, and I've never been happier."*
>
> *"Taking history classes with good professors … inspired me to change my academic plans."*
>
> *"Throughout fall-spring terms I enjoyed independence buying my own food, doing whatever I want and etc. I was proud to vote in the September federal election."*

Some participants reported positive experiences accessing services, university programs, and support options aimed to support their well being as students.

> *"The monthly check-ins with my Engage Leader through the Student Connect Program [were a high point]. These calls vastly improved my mental health and outlook on school. They helped me feel less alone in my studies, gave me hope for the future and provided some much needed laughs."*
>
> *"[high points were] being on top of my physical health by going to Carsa often … [and attending] activities on campus such as the colour run."*

"[a high point was] Registering with CAL and having supports put in place that I didn't have in high school … My grades ended up being better than I had expected, which made me feel more confident in being here"

Low points reported by participants within the wellbeing domain of the student experience include mental health challenges, feeling overwhelmed, experiencing personal failure, COVID 19 related concerns, and financial concerns.

Challenges with mental health were reported as the primary low point for participants within the wellbeing domain of the student experience. Mental health concerns related to isolation, a sense of failure, stress, anxiety, burnout, and overwhelm were reported frequently. Some students reported extreme mental health concerns that lead to hospitalization, or that included suicide ideation. Additionally, some students reported that the mental health challenges experienced by their friends, loved ones, and neighbours/roommates impacted their own health and wellbeing, and that they sometimes did not know what resources – if any – were available to support them.

"My anxiety during midterms/finals was through the roof and that was really hard to deal with. There were many moments when I felt like I wasn't good/smart enough for my program and that was scary."

"I hit a low point at the beginning of second term (January): I was emotionally and mentally drained and I had no motivation to do my work even though my I had some new courses."

"In the Fall and Winter terms, there were some … people that attached [sic] themselves to me and it brought me down. I believe this was due to a lack of accessible counselling services or services for people with Mental Health needs as they turned to their peers rather than professionals."

"The rain is brutal and the limited sunshine makes it hard to function."

"[I had] lots of anxiety about gaining weight and not having the time, money, or resources to seek appropriate eating disorder treatment."

"One of my lowest points was from right before the winter exams. I had panic attacks so severe I had to go to emergency, and I was worried I would give up at school completely … The panic was life or death. School should never feel like life or death. But growing up in poverty, education was always my ticket out. If I lost that then what did I really have?"

Some participants reported financial concerns as low points, particularly as they struggled to meet the basic requirements of food and shelter. Students reported concern about being able to remain at UVic due to financial constraints.

"I had to take a [part time job] to help pay for my tuition. Another low point was when realizing that working a full 20 hours per week every week … wouldn't even cover one term of tuition."

"[low points were] The expensive rent being [and being] unable to afford groceries"

Finally, participants noted concerns with and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic having an impact on their wellbeing throughout their first year. In particular, participants reported that the virtual start to classes in January 2022 and feeling a lack of COVID-19 safety on campus were low points.

"Specifically in the Winter term, there was a level of anxiety related to Covid restrictions being lifted and people were not respectful of other people's choices to continue wearing masks and/or they would come to school sick."

"Being in person with hundreds of students in one big room, many unmasked, was terrifying. A low point was watching the administration disregard the health and safety of students so blatantly by removing the mask mandate shortly after classes were moved online because of an omicron out break on campus."

Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility: High points reported by some participants in the student experience domain of Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility included participating in a diverse, supportive community and feeling a sense of acceptance.

"In February, I explored an autism diagnosis with a doctor through health and wellness. I was validated and did not face many institutional barriers to diagnosis because of my assigned gender at birth, which was a relief."

[my high point was] attending QVic meetings."

Low points reported by participants in the Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility domain of the student experience include negative interactions with campus services, discrimination, and a lack of feeling safe.

"[low point was] coming to the realization that being a minority could put me in danger at some point (around the time of the racial controversy surrounding the truck convoy)"

"In the first semester, I had a prof who did comment on my age more than once. The comments were not particularly negative, but they were irrelevant all the same."

"I was wanting a counsellor when I went to UVic and wrote early in September …I had called in September and wasn't booked for my consultation until late November…. [When I did receive care] The health care provided was simply unacceptable."

Section 3: Imagine

In this section survey participants were asked to share their ideas, suggestions, and thoughts about what would make a peer mentorship program meaningful for new students. A "peer mentor" was defined as an upper-year students who is matched with a new student to provide support, information, and connection. Participants were prompted to imagine what an ideal peer mentor program and relationship would be like for them as a first-year UVic students. Specifically, they were asked what type of programmatic experiences or outcomes would have made them want to sign up for a peer mentorship program, and what was important in 'matching' mentors to students. They were further asked to express how they imagined a peer mentor could support them during their "low points" (identified in Section 2).

i. Desired Participation Experience and Program Outcomes

Social Domain: Participants reported that an appealing peer mentorship program would provide advice, guidance, and support from peer mentors; that it would allow opportunities for students to connect with one another – both mentors and other first-year students; that it would offer regular, scheduled check-ins between peer mentors and participants as well as casual or informal support when needed; and that peers and participants could connect over shared interests or lived experience.

> *"A main thing that would interest me would be someone to talk to, especially during covid it was actually hard to make friends at UVic and most times family can't relate to your struggles about university because they aren't going through it alongside you. Just someone to listen without judgement, to be there for you, would be really nice for anyone to have."*

> *"I would … hope there would be some more formal events where the mentor would accompany their mentee to. From the program I would want to leave feeling like I had made more friends and that I would want to become a mentor myself."*

> *"Meeting someone with similar experiences to you - meeting someone who can guide you through some of the rougher times"*

> *"Getting to know people before starting school -getting to know what university life is actually like -real life experience of life at university because it is a lot different from what recruiters say."*

> *"[I] would sign up for the community and social benefits as I have a hard time making new friends."*

Having even the slightest bit of guidance makes life so much easier Even just talking to someone to answer questions prior to the semester and about the layout of campus would contribute to relief Creating a community of people who are struggling to make meaningful connections

Academic Domain: Participants reported that an appealing peer mentorship program would allow for program-specific connections and mentorship; the opportunity to learn academic strategies (such as time management skills, study skills, exam and assignment tips-and-tricks, etc.); and would allow participants to explore their career and network within their academic field.

"Study groups with mentors from my faculty would have been great."

"Conversation and guidance for the transition to post secondary learning - program-specific match with someone that has done experience with co-op or research in the program."

"I would sign up if there were opportunities to attend events or activities with the peer mentor. Not necessarily [sic] events run by the mentorship program, but being able to go to a "meet the prof" night or something with a mentor would have been super helpful."

"a more realistic understanding of how students space out their courses within their degree and the average time it takes to complete a bachelor degree -an in-depth look at the different learning opportunities offered through the university and how to participate in them (volunteering, exchange trips, upper-year research assistance opportunities) - advice regarding note-taking, studying, buying textbooks, living with roommates."

"Career connections -Someone who understands your degree and the classes required and has previously taken them, so can give you academic advice."

Wellbeing Domain: Participants reported that an appealing peer mentorship program would offer support for their overall transition to university; connect them with a mentor who was understanding and genuinely cared about them; and could provide information and referrals to relevant support services.

"How to properly get help. Whether [sic] it be with mental health or academic advising. Seeking help was very difficult and intimidating when I didn't know where to start."

"conversation and guidance for the transition to post secondary learning"

"I would want help planning my future with someone who knew more about that at UVic."

"I ... would want them to be a resource for me in finding campus resources or helping direct me to who I need to go to."

"I think if mentors spoke about their own experiences about being okay to have a small group of friends and not going out to "party" every weekend would be good. I also think that they should talk about the change between getting high school grades vs university grades, because I was very shocked when I was getting my first grades back and it did not reflect how I did in high school."

"Helping me to understand what I want (Am I making the right choice?) - Helping me visualize what my future years at UVic could look like - Pointing out the possible highlights of future years at UVic."

"I would want someone empathetic and who could understand my concerns."

Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility Domain: Participants reported that an appealing peer mentorship program would allow for connection over shared identity and support for particular identities and abilities. Participants reported wanting flexibility to access the program both in-person and virtually.

"I would have loved and joined any program that offered clarity with: mental health or adhd or lgbtqia2s+ program outcome: finally get your assignments in on time as an individual with adhd (no you did not complete it in one night, you actually paced yourself this time!)"

"Many means of communication with a mentor (in-person/online)."

"I'd like to be able to ask questions of my mentor as they come up, rather than being limited to designated times."

"A blend of in-person and online options. Having someone to asks any type of question to."

"Fun outings or shown places around campus and Victoria."

ii. Considerations for Matching Mentors

Social Domain: Participants primarily reported that having shared interests and complementary personalities were the two more important social factors for matching mentors to program participants. Further, participants identified experience with their living situation (ie. Off campus, in residence) and shared interests as factors to consider.

> *"It's hard to say, as each student has their own wants and needs. I think it's important to consider patience, and how much each student would be willing to do with a mentor."*

> *"Match people who have been in residence with kids who are going into residence so they can help them navigate it from experience."*

> *"I feel that interests are important as a large part of University is finding your peer groups and making new friends. Having a mentor with similar interests can really help in finding those social groups/people who you relate to."*

> *"I think how outgoing individuals are should be taken into account. If the mentor is not talking as much as they could and the student isn't asking questions they might not get a lot out of the experience."*

Academic Domain: Participants primarily reported that matching peer mentors with program participants in the same faculty and program was an important academic factor. They expressed the importance of having a mentor relate to the academic challenges they were experiencing and expressed a desire to learn from their mentor's lived experience as a former first-year student in the program. Further, participants indicated that it would be meaningful to be matched with a mentor who had some shared goals as them. For instance – similar career aspirations, or similar interests in undergraduate research opportunities.

> *"Also similar interests in school should be considered as they can have more insight for the student with different paths you can take and classes."*

Wellbeing Domain: Participants reported that it would be meaningful for program participants to be matched with mentors who shared similar wellness goals and personal values. Further, some participants noted that it would be important for peer mentors to have the capacity to assess the level of support a program-participant might need, and be able to set boundaries and make referrals when necessary.

> *"It's hard to say, as each student has their own wants and needs. I think it's important to consider patience, and how much each student would be willing to do with a mentor."*

Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility Domain: Participants frequently noted that it would be meaningful for to be able to select the gender-identity of their peer mentor. They expressed how

some participants may feel more- or less- comfortable connecting with a mentor of a particular gender identity given their own identity, their cultural experience, and their perceptions of fear or safety around gender-based violence.

> *"I think gender identity, program similarities, and hobbies/interests (if possible). Matching with someone of the same gender identity might make the experience more comfortable for some."*
>
> *"I think it's important to have the option for gender preference of mentor match, but it shouldn't be mandatory. Some people may not care at all and some people might only be comfortable in some situations."*
>
> *"I know that I would feel more comfortable talking to another woman about fears or anxieties, especially being in a STEM program."*

Participants acknowledged that shared "life experiences" would be a meaningful option for program-participants and peer mentors to be matched around – however the expressed meaning of life-experience varied amongst the statements. Students identified meaningful pairings could be found in shared: racial identity (Indigenous, Black, Person of Colour); LGBTQIA+ affinity; socio-economic background; and cultural background. Participants noted that it would be valuable to connect with mentors who are of similar age to them. This was particularly meaningful for mature students. Further, International students indicated that it would be meaningful to be able to select either a domestic student or other International student as their mentor, depending on their specific hopes around connecting with others in the community.

> *"If the student is domestic or international because they have different experiences."*
>
> *"I think definitely interests and maybe some sort of background life (where you're from/grew up etc.) because you want to be able to have a connection with this person. Like for example, someone who may have grown up in a low income family might not bond very well with a mentor that grew up in a high income family that hasn't experienced that sort of stress. I know things like that can definitely affect the relationship between people."*
>
> *"What they have in common that leads to institutional barriers, ie queer, POC, disabled, etc. this is important because being apart of such groups shapes your experiences. A white man can't explain to me how to cope with being in a tutorial group full of students who just don't want to hear a femme person *speak*."*
>
> *"I think area of study, age, and interests are important to match … I mention to consider age, more in the sense of pairing mature students simply because it helps mature students establish a better relationship than being shown around or directed by someone who may be considerably younger than them."*

"Life experiences, demographics such as if they have a family or [sic] a mature student."

iii. Ideal Mentoring Relationship, Communication, and Support

Social Domain: Participants indicated that an ideal mentorship relationship would involve being able to rely on their peer mentor for advice, guidance, and support for making friends and connecting with others. The importance of developing a sense of trust, safety, and comfort came up frequently from participants. Further, they hoped to be able seek guidance around general 'university life' such as registering for classes, finding housing, and navigating Victoria. And ideal relationship would involve the peer mentor checking in with program-participants regularly, and providing a "listening ear". Participants hoped that a peer mentor would meet with them in an informal way, and show the desire for genuine care and friendship. They reported a desire for peer mentors to facilitate opportunities for program-participants to meet others by attending events together.

"Someone who is available to answer questions when they come up, someone who has had many experience at the school so is knowledgeable. So if they've taken part in clubs or sports or other stuff."

"…in person meeting with a group once a month at an accessible place on campus"

"I think for me a coffee meeting every couple weeks could have been really nice. Just to discuss current stresses, and get advice for both in school and out of class things."

"An ideal peer mentor relationship would include being able to contact them when I need support. Having face to face interactions. Planning group activities or helping you find activities that fit into your schedule. Offering help in finding resources. Also offering activities and things to do that work within the schedule of someone who lives off campus."

Academic Domain: Participants reported hoping that peer mentors would be able to provide support to program-participants by sharing their knowledge of a particular program through advice and encouragement. Participants reported that it was important that program-participants could come to their peer mentor with questions about how to succeed academically – particularly, they noted that it would be valuable to receive support with studying through accountability (ie. studying alongside each other, checking in regarding deadlines and progress) and sharing study strategies.

"Studying together would really help with motivation."

"Someone who would check in at least bi-weekly can help give study tips and provide professional and educational advice."

"...Each time we meet we could discuss what assignments I have going and how I'm feeling about them as well as mentally overall."

"Someone to ask my dumb questions to. Like how do I register for second year courses? Where is a good spot to study? How did you deal with a difficult prof? What time to grades ratio is good? How did you balance work and school?"

Wellbeing Domain: Findings for wellbeing support were similar to those for support within the social domain. Participants indicated that they thought an ideal mentoring relationship would involve regularly checking in and providing a listening, caring ear. Some participants noted that it would be supportive if peer mentors could act as friends and help them 'de-stress' during challenging times to help boost their mental health. Participants did not indicate a desire for peer mentors to provide wellbeing support beyond the scope of companionship.

"For me, a mentor that would check up on me periodically would be ideal. I do not like seeking out people even if I need help because I find that difficult. ...Support with time management and scheduling would be helpful. This could be looking over deadlines and organizing dates with each other. Support with well being would also be important. This could be having someone who is available to listen to you, but also having activities such as going for a walk to de-stress."

"I think an ideal peer mentor relationship would look like just an older sibling. There for you when you need it and to just talk stuff out as well. being a first year student is extremely overwhelming and not easy. So to just have someone to talk to that's not in your friend circle would be nice to clear issues up that's going on in your life."

Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility: Participants did not report specific considerations of how their imagined ideal mentoring relationship, support, or communication might look that fell within the domain of Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility.

Communication preferences: It was important to participants that a mentorship program allowed for flexibility of how the program-participants communicated with their mentor. Participants reported that being able to connect with a peer mentor over email would be their desired way to communicate outside of scheduled meetings. Specifically, when they had a "quick question" they expressed how it would be helpful to be able to reach out to a mentor virtually and expect a relatively timely response. Participants also indicated a strong desire for both scheduled 'check-ins' and the ability to reach out 'when needed'.

Participants reported that scheduled in-person or virtual check-ins should happen either bi-weekly or monthly, depending on the preference and capacity of program-participants. A few reported that the option to "only reach out when needed" would make participating in the program more desirable for them.

"A scheduled time for meet up but also an option to schedule impromptu talks. Kind and encouraging messages spontaneously."

"Ideally, there'd be little pressure to meet up and talk about my experience so far, I would prefer to be able to message them and ask for advice on small things I would otherwise decide on my own, but may benefit from the hearing the thoughts of someone experienced."

"Communication would be facilitated by the mentor, but there would also be flexibility for the mentee to reach out when they wanted to talk. The mentor should have some general guiding questions and useful information to share, but support should also be adjusted to the mentee's needs."

iv. Peer mentor Support during Low Points

Social Domain: participants reported that during the low points of their semester the most significant support they could imagine a peer mentor providing was simply "being available and present". Many participants struggled with loneliness, particularly toward the beginning of the academic year. Participants reported the value of able to talk about stressors and challenges with a peer, being able to "vent", and feeling as though they are genuinely being heard. Frequently students identified a hope for being able to connect with a mentor who had "been through sometime similar". The terms "listening ear" and "just being there" were used often by participants.

"Someone to just talk to and see in person and have them say a few supportive things for a while, showing they really do care and want you to succeed."

"Having someone to talk to and knowing that I am not alone in the 'low-point' experiences I am having as a first year student would have helped tremendously. Not necessarily someone to offer me advice, but just someone to lend an ear."

Academic Domain: Many of the participants reported struggling with poor academic performance and the resulting emotional and mental toll that took on them as individuals – the further indicated that having a peer 'validate' their feelings around these experiences would be meaningful. Students reported that a peer mentor could help them during academic low points by offering tips and advice grounded in their own experiences of failure, challenge, or academic adversity. Further, some students reported hoping for support with their time management and setting priorities for moving forward from a low point.

"I believe that my low point in my year were all my own consequences of not managing time, but maybe if my peer mentor organizes a study at the library or any other place on campus, I would have joined and taken advantage."

"[by] offering first hand experience on stressful situations such as switching programs / failing a class / being waitlisted. It would have been nice to have someone who understands these processes and situations to guide me through."

Wellbeing Domain: Students once again acknowledged that mental health often was a primary low point throughout their first year. Most students further acknowledged that while a peer mentor could not replace professional support, simply having someone to speak with honestly and without fear of judgement about their mental health struggles would have been meaningful during these times. Further, students reported that having a trusted peer mentor be able to give specific referrals to support services – including information on how to access them and what they could expect upon reaching out – would have been welcome and valuable.

"The most meaningful support during the low points for me would have included having someone to talk to about being homesick and stressed, also having a connection with someone who had experience and would be able to give strategies and suggestions when sad/stressed."

"The most valuable thing to me in those times would have been just someone to listen to me. There may have been times I would have wanted information about support as well. Should I talk to the prof? Go to office hours? Make an apt with the Centre for Learning? Can you tell me how to access counselling? Things like that..."

Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility Domain: Some students reported that it would feel supportive for a peer mentor to help navigate specific barriers that they faced on campus including feeling treated unfairly by instructors, and finding accessibility support.

"Help navigating accessibility barriers would've been superb!"

v. Additional reflections

As a final question in Section 3 students were asked if they had any other thoughts, ideas, or suggestions about what would make a peer mentorship program meaningful for new UVic students.

Social Domain: Participants suggested that: that the program should allow for 'small group' meet ups and ways for students to be introduced to each other; and that there could be opportunities to connect with many different mentors, either in-group settings or though 'guest speakers' and events;

"Each individual student [has a different] level of comfort with certain activities. Some students prefer group activities while others would prefer one-on-one activities. I think working to support the individual student's needs in this manner will help to create more meaningful relationships and outcomes for the program."

"Allowing for students to have access to a group of mentors, to have a wide variety of advice and help. Also convenient if the student doesn't vibe well with their one assigned mentor."

"Providing activities that students can do both on and off of campus could help with mental health. Especially for students that struggle socially."

Academic Domain: Some participants suggested having mentors help facilitate connections with faculty members.

"I think it would be cool for the mentor to introduce the mentee to faculty members they've made connections with over their years of studying. Some first years are hesitant to talk to and get to know their professors and this would be a great way to get a firsthand look at the value of making connections."

Wellbeing Domain: Students highlighted the importance of peer mentors to be equipped with knowledge of many different resources so they could make meaningful referrals.

"...Ensure each mentor has a bunch of on campus resources for the mentee, such as the peer support group in the SUB or the Sexualized Violence Prevention program."

Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility Domain: Students suggested that peer mentors receive training on how to support program-participants from many different backgrounds, identities, and abilities.

"*Having some sort of basic training for peer mentors or a handbook/manual, just with basic information to understand how other students may struggle with mental health, identity, relationships, etc."*

One theme emerged that did not fit within the bounds of the analytical framework. Students expressed that it would be important for program organizers to consider how the peer mentorship program was branded and advertised, as some students might perceive peer mentorship programs are for participants that do not possess maturity or competence.

"Normalize the program. Treating it like something everyone does will help draw both mentors and mentees to it."

"Students are hesitant to join because it might seem a bit immature to have a mentor."

"Maybe brand the peer mentor program in a different way. I know myself going into first year would not have been too eager to sign up for a "peer mentor" because it seems a bit babying. I think it could be more sought after if people were to think of it as advice from upper year students about anything from classes to friends."

"I would want the program to be normalized, I feel like often mentorship programs like this (upper year to lower year) unless typical (everyone has one) get a bad reputation for being for less experienced people. I would hope this wouldn't be the case and think a program like this has a lot of potential to be fun."

Section 4: Looking forward

In this final section, participants were asked to compare what they believed now to what they believed before they began their studies at UVic. Specifically, they were asked to consider how their present hopes, expectations, fears or concerns for the remainder of their university experience compared to before they began and whether they have been realized, changed, or adapted following their first year of studies.

Responses for this section were so varied that it was difficult to identify specific themes within each domain. Socially, many students felt more confident going into their second year as they had formed relationships with others and felt as though they had a support system in place. Some felt less confident and did not feel as though they had met their expectation of meeting people. Some students reported having negative experiences on campus or accessing mental health support which lead to their future expectations being less optimistic.

"My hopes for the next year are fairly similar to the first, but my fears and concerns have mostly gone away."

"I no longer fear the academic aspect, but I am still intimidated by my peers. However, I have come to enjoy being self sufficient."

"I am not hopeful that UVic is an accessible institution. My fears have been affirmed, I expect to be discriminated against, and treated poorly in the years to come."

Many students reported adapting their academic expectations and having a more realistic expectation about what their university experience would be like. Further, many students reported having positive interactions with faculty and staff throughout the year that changed their expectation.

Overall, students reported feeling less fear and concern going into their second year.

"*I now realize that professors are not scary and have office hours and are always willing to help. I also realize and re-adjusted my expectations for my grades and classes are going to be hard but trying your best will always pay off.*

"With my first year complete, I realize I am capable of keeping up with my studies. I have a lot of comfort from learning that there are supports in a lot of places (academic and emotional) and that they're so worth accessing. I am still concerned about money

and having enough of it for living expenses. I feel a much greater sense of belonging than I ever imagined."

4.3 Experiences of students from various faculties

The survey attempted to represent a snapshot of students from the 8 undergraduate faculties at UVic by surveying students in proportion to faculty enrollment numbers. However, as noted in Table 1 – some smaller faculties (including Education, Human and Social Development, Fine Arts, Business, and Humanities) only had between 2-10 students invited to complete the survey. As such, faculty-specific student needs should be considered an area for future research and specific research questions should be developed to encompass the unique learning experiences and expectations that students have within a given faculty or area of study.

Most themes related to hopes, expectations, fears, high-point, low-points, and the value of a peer-to-peer mentorship program were reflected across all the faculties. Some additional patterns emerged:

Given the small sample size from the Faculty of Education I cannot draw any conclusions for this faculty.

Students in Human and Social Development reported the high hopes for establishing personal connections and relationships and expressed that relationship challenges constituted their primary low points during the year. Generally, these students expressed high points around the learnings from the subject that they were studying.

Students in the Gustavson School of Business expressed a variety of different hopes, expectations, fears, and high- or low-points. However, students in this faculty clearly expressed a hope for a program-specific mentor who could support with networking and the development of academic strategies.

Students in Fine Arts tended to have high-points around meeting their peers and forming connections, and some low-points around their academic experience and their own performance. Shared interests and 'compatible personalities' were consistent values they expressed when being paired with a mentor.

Students in Humanities expressed high points around participating in the university community and enjoying their learning environment. However, low points trended around negative class experiences and a sense of failure or not succeeding in class. A number of Humanities students also indicated that their mental health and a sense of overwhelm/stress was a challenge for them in their first year.

Engineering and Computer Science students tended to expect a heavy or challenging workload prior to their studies beginning. Many students indicated hopes around academic success and fears around academic failure – more students in this faculty appeared worried about

failing before the year started than students in most other faculties. There were various high- and low- points for Engineering and Computer Science students, however there was a trend towards exams and testing being a low-point for many students in this faculty. A hope for program specific mentor matching was very consistent amongst this group, and having regular check-ins and receiving advice, guidance, and support were primary hopes for the mentor program.

In Science, many students also expected a challenging workload, and also expressed a variety of other hopes, expectations and fears. Negative classroom (particularly lab) experiences stood out as a low-point amongst this group, as did their experiences with exams and testing. Support with academic strategies and having program-specific connections were seen as highly valuable in a mentoring relationship.

Finally, the largest group to complete the survey – and the most varied in their responses – were students from Social Sciences. There was a strong trend towards hoping for form meaningful relationships with other students and fears around being lonely. There were a variety of different high- and low-points that did not show any strong trends. This group did encompass the most international students indicating that they hoped international/domestic status would be considered when matching mentors.

4.5 Conclusion of Findings:

Research participants were asked to reflect of various aspects of their experiences, and through that activity clear trends were demonstrated. Socially students were concerned with their sense of belonging, social-connectivity and creating new friendships, their experience of loneliness, and their participation within a group. Academically students were concerned about their performance, connecting with academic peers, and feeling motivated and inspired by their coursework. The research participants frequently noted the experience of feeling overwhelmed and stressed during the lowest points of their year and identified many ways their mental wellbeing suffered due to the impacts of their university experience. Some participants noted ways that their experience of equity, diversity, and accessibility was either supported or challenged, demonstrating an inconsistency within that experience. Overall, research participants were able to identify multiple ways that having an upper year peer mentor could have made an impact on their first-year experience that might have supported more positive student outcomes.

5.0 Discussion and Analysis

This section summarizes the project's research findings from the literature review and data gathered from research participants and interprets those findings to suggest practical programmatic recommendations for the client. The primary research question is addressed through the lens of each of the proposed "student experience domains". The overall findings from this research project suggest many ways that peer-to-peer mentorship can be a very effective programmatic intervention for students in their first year at UVic that may lead to more positive student outcomes. By understanding the hopes and expectations of new UVic students, identifying areas of challenge and/or struggle, and exploring student's ideas for what would make a peer-to-peer mentorship program meaningful, this research can be used to help develop a framework for peer mentoring that is responsive to current student needs.

5.1 Literature Review and Survey Findings

Positive Student Outcomes

The literature findings on what a constituted as a positive student – from the perspective of the student – were demonstrated throughout the survey findings. Students noted a hope for and experienced 'high points' around topics such as: having authentic relationships with their faculty leaders, being treated with empathy and as 'real people' rather than faceless consumers of education, and responsiveness from instructors to support their diverse learning needs and cultures (Cutri, Mena, & Feinauer Whiting, 2020; Krammer, Pflanzl, & Mayr, 2019; Arthur, 2017). Further, networking, career expansion, and exposure to real-world application of learning were considered positive experiences in both the survey findings and literature (Shah, Pabel, & Richardson, 2021).

Unsurprisingly, the seminal works of Vincent Tinto (1975; 1987) imploring the importance of 'sense of belonging', social-connectivity, and academic integration as fundamental to positive students outcomes – findings which have been demonstrated repeatedly in student experience research and literature over the past four decades – were further reflected in the survey findings. Students repeatedly noted how their social and academic experiences directly impacted their mental wellbeing.

The Current Student Experience

The survey responses from students who recently completed their first year of studies reinforced many findings from the literature review section of this report. Participants identified all of Kane and William's (2021) current and anticipated trends in the student experience as relevant to their own experience: financial position, concerns for serious study, managing time, mental health, sexualized violence, and personal progression. Many participants speculated on ways that a peer

mentor might be able to support them through challenges associated with those trends by providing support, guidance, and resource options.

Financial position: Research participants did not specifically note how a peer mentor might help with financial position, however they did express a hope for meaningful referrals to services that responded to their specific needs. Within the scope of their role, peer mentors could assess their students for financial wellbeing and refer student awards and financial aid (SAFA) and identify other campus resources for students struggling with their financial positions such as the work study program or the student support coordinator program.

Concerns for serious study & time management: Research participants frequently noted the hope for and value of meaningful peer- and faculty-based academic connections. Peer mentors were considered a conduit for facilitating those connections. Further, while some students expressed how it would be beneficial for a peer mentor to fulfill the role of a tutor, more participants expressed that they understood tutoring is not the role of a mentor – and instead expressed hope for specific academic coaching, tips to build good academic habits, and study strategies. The concept of accountability came up several times from participants – the idea that a peer mentor might be able to be an external source of accountability to deadlines and commitments. These findings suggest that in an effective peer mentorship program for UVic students, the mentor would be an academic leader and have the knowledge and capacity to provide coaching and support

Personal Progression: Participants expressed hopes and expectations around developing a sense of purpose and finding support at the university to help them achieve their personal goals. They hoped to explore and discuss their goals with their mentor and hoped that by participating in the program they experience opportunities to network with professionals and academic peers. While there is not much literature, I was able to find that expands on Kane & William's claims, this has been clearly demonstrated in the survey data collected for this report.

Sexualized violence: A small number of research participants expressed concerns for safety related to sexualized violence and suggested that a peer mentor might be a 'safe' person to bring these concerns to. However, a clear finding from this survey was the significance of allowing for a gender-based mentor matching option for many participants. These students discussed how this option would allow for a greater sense of comfort and safety in the program, stating how they would feel more capable of engaging meaningfully with a peer mentor if they were able to select the gender of that mentor.

Mental Health: The significance of how the student experience impacts mental wellbeing was clearly demonstrated in the participant data, with struggles around mental health being one of the most frequently cited "low points" within the first-year experience. Survey responses showed a correlation between the experience of loneliness, academic failure, and mental wellbeing challenges. Many participants expressed how having a peer mentor as someone they could

simply talk to and go to for advice would have felt supportive throughout the year and would make a program very valuable for them. This also suggests that the existing mental health services offered to students are not always meeting the needs of students – and the lack of accessibility to on-campus and off-campus mental health services was noted several times in the data. This brings up a concern around the 'role' of a peer mentor and demonstrates a need for strong training in peer-helping, resource referrals, and setting boundaries. It also highlights a need for a reporting process for peer mentors that provides both them and the mentees more structured and external help when the scope of the mentee's mental health challenge falls outside the bounds of peer-helping provided by the mentor.

Equity: Participants wanted to find a sense of community that aligned with their identity, feel a sense of acceptance, and live within a diverse community. They reported struggling with service accessibility, and some reported being discriminated against. They expressed that a peer mentor might be someone who they could connect with over their shared lived-experience and could help them navigate resources and processes.

Peer mentorship as a Promising Practice for Supporting Positive Student Outcomes

The literature on student experience programming suggested that peer-to-peer mentoring experiences could be a high-impact intervention on student engagement capacity and positive student outcomes (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Kuh G. , 2008). In the survey findings participants repeatedly noted that the potential positive impact of having a dedicated upper-year peer mentor on all aspects of their student experience. They imagined a mentor who would be able to support them both personally and academically and speculated on how these 'early interventions' from a caring peer could have kept them from continuing further down the path of their 'low points'. Some participants noted that a mentor could not be the singular solution to their challenges – for example, they recognized the capacity that a peer had compared to a professional for support, they understood the lack of agency a mentor might have within the university system, and they noted that their academic performance or learning struggles were often personal and not something that could be 'solved' by someone else. However almost all of these participants still expressed the benefit of a mentor for support and guidance during these challenging times, and noted how just being 'listened to' could make those difficult situations more positive.

The literature suggested that students who participated engagement opportunities such as in peer mentorship programs have higher levels of participation within all aspects of the university community throughout their time as students – and that this increases positive student outcomes (Snowden & Hardy, 2012; Williams, Pendlebury, Thomas, & Smith, 2017; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). Research participants frequently noted how an ideal peer mentor would help introduce them to the university community and help them participate more in events, activities, opportunities, and other resources for students. As suggested in the literature, participants reflected that having a peer mentor could support their self-esteem and

confidence in developing more social-connectivity, forming new relationships, and participating in community – all behaviours that lead to more positive student outcomes (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014; Allens, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2008).

A very high number of participants noted that mental wellbeing as a primary low point for them during the year. While experience of mental wellbeing was noted in the literature – particularly 'negative' mental health concerns experienced widely within student populations around topics such as stress, suicidality, isolation, and mental illness (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2021; Porter, 2018), little literature was found to support the potential positive impact peer mentorship programs might have on students. However, participants frequently speculated how their mental wellbeing might be positively impacted by having a dedicated peer mentor accessible during difficult times. They noted how having someone listen to them, someone who may demonstrate understanding based on their own lived-experience, could have been exceptionally valuable during the 'lowest points'. The potential for resource referrals, connections to peers, and simply feeling 'less alone' was perceived as an exceptionally valuable role that a peer mentor might play within their first-year experience.

Finally, the literature suggested that more students are seeking flexibility within their university experience, and that virtual-mentorship experiences have the potential to provide some of that flexibility of how students access support (Schuman, Fields, Parekh, Woody, & Miller, 2021; Matthews & Cook-Sather, 2021). Research participants demonstrated a wide range of viewpoints on how they would like to access the program – some wanted virtual access, others wanted in-person, while many expressed that the ability to have *both* virtual and in-person mentoring experiences would make the program valuable. The capacity for a peer mentor program to be delivered in a hybrid way would increase accessibility and potentially meet the needs of more student participants.

5.2 Students from equity seeking groups

The limited responses from participants that identified equity, diversity, and accessibility concerns focused on institutional fairness and structural barriers that made it difficult for students with disabilities to access certain supports. Disaggregation of the data did not demonstrate any other significant differences on how most students who identified as belonging to equity-seeking groups experienced their first-year of university. Some students indicated a hope to connect with a mentor who had a shared sexual identity. Much of the literature focused reviewed noted the importance of connections around race, ethnicity, and shared culture – however this was not seen in the survey findings. Unexpectedly, very few students expressed a hope for connection around racial, ethnic, or shared cultural identity – though about 20% of the participants identified as "person of colour". It is important to note the limitation of this survey in effectively capturing the experiences of racialized students, and continue this research in a more targeted way (see section: *6.2 Areas for future research and consideration*)

5.3 International students

As explained in the Findings section, international student participants selected at a ratio of pre-pandemic enrollment (table 2). International students more frequently noted that having "nationality" or "international or domestic student status" should be considered when matching mentors and mentees. Unexpectedly, there were no other significant differences in the thematic responses from first year International students that there were from domestic students. However, it is important to consider that the impact of negative situations – such as not getting into housing or feeling a sense of loneliness and isolation from peers – may be more acute for new international students, as they are often less connected to a personal support network, or are unaware of how particular processes might work for accessing and receiving support (Bista, 2011; Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010). While this was not expressed in the survey findings, the literature broadly reinforces the need for providing specific transitional support for international supports for international students. It is also important to note the limitation of this survey in effectively capturing the experiences of international students, and to continue this research in a more targeted way (see section: *6.2 Areas for future research and consideration*).

5.4 Conclusion of Discussion

The experience of being a first-year university student is challenging. Navigating the transition to university presents a variety of difficulties and opportunities for students who are new to university. Every single survey participant was able to identify multiple 'low points' throughout their first year – and, retrospectively, was able to imagine how a supportive peer mentor might have helped eased the negative impact of those experiences. Many of the themes identified in the literature around the first-year experience were demonstrated in the survey findings – social connectivity, academic integration, personal wellbeing, and the ability to access university were pillars of a 'successful transition' into the institution – and the ingredients for positive student outcomes.

6.0 Recommendations and Areas for Further Research

Based on these research findings, it is likely that a peer-to-peer mentorship program for new UVic students would lead to more positive student outcomes in all areas of the student experience. As such, **this report recommends the creation of a sustainable peer-to-peer mentorship program for first-year students administered by the Office of Student Life.** This section provides recommendations based on this research for what that program should offer students and mentors. It further makes recommendations around a program structure, including mentor recruitment, training, and activities.

These recommendations should be considered within the re-envisioning process of how peer mentorship programming is delivered to first-year students. Most of the recommendations are scalable and it is at the discretion of Office of Student Life to the extent that these recommendations are adopted – for example, they could be piloted within just one faculty or student group.

6.1 Peer mentorship Program Recommendations

6.1.a Program Structure: Participants reported that they wanted to be able to ask their mentor to connect in a flexible way, particularly over email or instant message when they had 'simple' or 'quick' questions. They further indicated hoping for regular scheduled check-ins that were flexible as well – some mentioned wanted to meet informally over coffee, others said that virtual meetings would make the program more accessible.

- Mentees should be recruited into the program upon acceptance to the university so that initial mentorship connections can happen ahead of the school year beginning. This will allow peer mentors to form relationships with their mentees within the highest impact 'window of time' – the first few days -- of a new student's experience (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014; Tinto, 1987)

- A marketing and advertising strategy should be developed with key UVic Communications stakeholders and should be sensitive to the association between being a 'mentee' and 'immaturity'. Research participants identified that the perception of mentees needing 'babying' as a barrier to first years choosing to participate in a mentorship program.

- Peer mentors and participants should be grouped in cohorts. These cohorts can deliver social/learning events together, share training and resources, and allow for a logical supervision structure. This addresses a consistent hope for connections with other students, particularly those with shared interests and similar academic goals. Consider:
    - Faculty cohorts

    - Identity-based cohorts (ie. Indigenous Students, LGBTQIA students, students with a disability, racialized students)
    - Lived-experience cohorts (ie. lived experience in care, mature students, international students) cohorts.
        - Consider the capacity of the program coordinator staff to appropriately support and resource identity-based and lived-experience cohorts. Ensure that there are identity-relevant support partnerships established before the launch of these cohorts to provide a meaningful and safer experience for participants and mentors. These cohorts may benefit from 'pilots' that are not all launched at once.

  Each cohort should have their own "expected outcomes for participating" for both mentees and mentors. Mentors should apply to a specific cohort during the recruitment process.

- Create leadership positions that support the mentors and program operations in each of the cohorts. This position could be held by a senior mentor or program coordinator. They can play the role of training, supervision/accountability of mentors, and supporting mentors as they navigate concerns, and accessing additional support for struggling students.

- Mentorship activities should be offered both in-person and virtually.

6.1.b Matching Mentors and Mentees: Participants strongly noted the hope that their mentor would be someone in the same program as them. Both the participants and literature future suggested offering a choice of mentor's gender and some stated that personal 'background' (ie. international student, sexual identity, racial identity, ability). Personality and shared interests were also suggested by research participants as being very meaningful for matching.

- Group mentees with a peer mentor in their faculty, and whenever possible, within their own program of study. This allows for natural sharing of personal experience with the subject area, a stronger sense of social connection to those with shared interests, and a greater sense of connection and belonging within their academic community.

- Allow mentees to identify their preferences for a mentor that centres their sense of comfort, personal identity, and lived-experience. Develop a matching system that allows both mentees and mentors to self-locate based on the following areas:
    - Gender
    - Age
    - Domestic and/or international student affinity
    - Any additional identity- or lived-experience based cohorts that the program can pilot (see program structure section)

It is essential that mentors are prepared and comfortable acting as a mentor within the bounds of their 'lived-experience'. For example, it should not be assumed that racialized mentors will be able or willing to support a student who is specifically seeking connection around their shared racial identity.

- Allow mentors and mentees to indicate their personal interests, goals, and/or expectations from a mentoring relationship to strengthen the matching process.

- Create experiences where program participants can meet other upper-year student mentors (ie. Program 'mixer' events) to allow for more connections with upper-year students.

- Develop a framework for communicating expectations between mentors and mentees that establishes boundaries, areas of comfort, and expectations for the experience.

6.1.c Address Student Experience Domains: Within the mentorship program design, all four identified student experience domains should be addressed regularly between mentors and mentees. This will promote a holistic experience for students in the program. Many of the following recommendations are focused on recruitment, program operations, and mentor training learning outcomes.

Social: Throughout their first year of university participants indicated that their goals were to connect with others, form meaningful relationships, and participate in the university community. Students struggled the most with loneliness, relationship challenges (making and maintaining friendships), and negative housing experiences. They imagined that an ideal mentorship program would involve receiving advice, guidance, and support from a mentor, forming an authentic relationship with their mentor, and connecting with other students by participating in the program.

- Provide mentors with regular updates on resources and referral options that support social connection. Train mentors on active listening, support, and peer coaching.

- Integrate social events within the scope of the program. These events could be optional, but attendance may be incentivized to help students overcome initial hesitations – for example: a certificate program, prize drawings, or 'benefits' such as food.

Academic: Participants hoped to do well in their classes, learn new things, and find a sense of connection with others in their faculty – including peers and faculty members. They struggled with failure, overwhelming workload, taking exams, discouragement and low motivation to persist following disappointment. They imagined an ideal mentor would be able to help them develop academic strategies, give them program specific tips and advice, and support them with building their academic and professional network.

- Create partnerships with faculty leadership to support peer mentor training and faculty-engagement opportunities. Offer non-curricular networking opportunities within the faculty for students, mentors, and more senior individuals in the faculty (including upper-year students, graduate students, instructors, TAs, faculty, and administrative staff)

- Train peer mentors on how to provide basic academic support and coaching in the following areas:
    - Time management, prioritization, and 'study strategies'
    - Assignment and Exam/testing preparedness
    - Resources for academic success (ie. UVic Maths and Stats centre, the Centre for Academic Communication)
    - Resources for academic support (ie. Centre for Accessible Learning, Academic Advising)
    - Academic involvement opportunities (ie. Course unions, undergraduate research, field schools)
    - Wherever possible, integrate faculty-specific information for each of these areas of academic support and coaching.

Wellbeing: Participants wanted to develop a sense of independence and experience personal development, gain direction and purpose, and feel balanced. They reported struggling the most with their mental health, feelings of being stressed and overwhelmed, personal failure and not meeting their own expectations, and concerns related to COVID-19. They imagined a peer mentor could support them by providing transitional support, showing compassion and understanding, and making referrals.

- During the mentor selection process assess a candidate's capacity to appropriately hold space, demonstrate compassion, practice good judgement, and set/maintain boundaries.

- Train mentors on the first-year student experience, mental health services, peer-helping, resource referrals, and crisis response.

- Ensure mentors attend regular check-ins with a senior program leader or coordinator to check in about the wellbeing needs and trends of their students, and of themselves.

Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility: Participants wanted to find a sense of community that aligned with their identity, feel a sense of acceptance, and live within a diverse community. They reported struggling with service accessibility, and some reported being discriminated against. They expressed that a peer mentor might be someone who they could connect with over their shared lived-experience, and could help them navigate resources and processes.

- Train mentors on important processes and resources around accessibility, support, and fairness on campus. Include university supports (ie. Centre for Accessible Learning, QVic, the Student Support Coordinator program, the Student Wellness Centre) and student-lead supports (ie. The Peer Support Centre, Society for Students with a Disability, UVic Pride, the Students of Colour Collective).

- Train mentors on self-awareness, anti-racism, and anti-oppression. Continue these conversations throughout their time as a mentor with their senior leaders.

While original iteration of the *New Student Connect* program included many of these recommended program elements, this report has demonstrated the worthiness of these practices in connection to positive student outcomes. The Client, UVic's Office of Student Life, could consider reviewing the existing guiding documents for the New Student Connect programs and make updates and changes to reflect these recommendations.

6.2 Areas for future research and consideration

There are several gaps in our knowledge of the effectiveness of peer-to-peer mentorship programs and how they can impact positive student outcomes that would benefit from further research, including an evaluation of the effectiveness of these type of programs for different student groups. Some areas of future research could include:

1. An exploration of how participating in peer mentorship programs impact positive student outcomes for upper year student mentors. This could help inform recruitment and selection processes, the training and supervision offered, and could potentially inform the development of a certificate program or credited program for peer mentors.

2. Understanding what would make a peer-to-peer mentorship program meaningful and effective at influencing positive student outcomes for the following student groups:
    - Specific faculty groups
    - Mature students
    - Graduate students
    - Transfer students
    - Students of Colour
    - Students with a disability(ies)

3. A culturally informed assessment of the specific hopes and experiences of new Indigenous students, and how can peer-to-peer mentorship programming support the Indigenous student experience on campus. This is research that could be done in partnership with stakeholders in the Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement, the Native Students Union, and external cultural organizations in the

Greater Victoria area.

4. An assessment of the barriers for students participating in mentorship programs (both mentees and mentors). This research could include gaining a greater understanding of the 'perceptions' of peer mentorship at the university level, as well as the perceived value, benefits, and drawbacks of participating.

5. A longitudinal study of program participants throughout their university experience, to gauge the long-term impact of peer mentoring that happens in the first year. This research could measure persistence to graduation, community involvement, and overall student satisfaction with their experience.

7.0 Conclusion

This project has explored the potential of a peer-to-peer mentorship program for undergraduate UVic students that supports positive student outcomes. Positive student outcomes were considered through both the institutional lens, and the lens of individual students. This report concludes that a peer-to-peer mentorship program grounded in supporting 4 unique aspects of the student experience – social, academic, wellbeing, and 'equity, diversity, and accessibility' – may have significant positive impacts on the student experience for those who participate. Peer mentorship programming has the potential to improve student engagement within the overall campus community. This type of programming can provide enriching leadership opportunities for upper year students, an increased feeling of social-connectiveness on campus, and an overall sense of belonging for program participants.

The continuing impacts of COVID-19 on the UVic community are uncertain. The likelihood of future waves, the severity of potential infections, and the timing of significant community spread remain unpredictable, however like other respiratory viruses "incidence of COVID-19 may increase in the later fall and winter seasons and … new variants of concern may emerge" (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022). A strength of peer-to-peer mentorship programming as proposed is the ability for it to adapt and respond to changing public health conditions. Both students and the literature highlight the positive potential of hybrid student-life programming – when a mentorship program can be delivered in person, virtually, or both, it is more resilient to changing guidelines and policies around in-person contact. This type of programming is flexible, high-impact, and can help support continuity of an overall first-year experience during times of administrative and public uncertainty.

A broad literature review demonstrated the importance and value of programmatic supports offered to students through their first-year experience, and how high-impact interventions such as peer-mentorship programming can improve academic performance, university engagement, mental wellbeing, retention, and persistence to graduation (Wai-Ling Packard, 2018; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Kuh G. , 2008). The literature review further highlighted the positive impact that identity- and lived-experience- based peer-mentorship can have on students from a diverse array of backgrounds. Both the literature and the participant survey illuminated current trends in the student experience. Key hopes, expectations, concerns, and program-structure ideas were identified, organized into the themes of social, academic, wellbeing, and 'equity, diversity, and accessibility', and used to suggest recommendations for how to design an effective and responsive program for new UVic students.

The research was limited in its ability to capture the unique experiences of Indigenous students and other students from equity-seeking groups at UVic. It is recommended that further research is conducted to understand experiences of transfer, mature, and graduate students, Indigenous students, students from diverse gender identities, students of colour, students with a disability(ies).

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APPENDIX A: Email Invitation to Participate in Research

Hello <student name>,

The Office of Student Life is conducting research on peer-to-peer mentorship programs for new students at the University of Victoria. **You are invited to participate in this research.**

What is involved?

Participants will complete a written survey questionnaire. Participants will be asked questions about their experience being a first-year student at UVic. Further, this survey asks participants to suggest what could make an "ideal" peer-based mentorship program meaningful or beneficial for new UVic students.

The survey has 11 short answer questions. Identifying information will not be collected as part of this survey, however some demographic information (ie. racial or ethnic identity, gender identity) will be requested, but is optional for participants to provide. It is estimated to take 20 - 40 minutes to complete the survey.

The survey will be distributed to research participants on Wednesday May 25th, 2022. Participants must be complete the survey by June 1st, 2022 to receive compensation.

Compensation

As an acknowledgement of your time, **selected survey participants will be offered $15.00 paid directly to their OneCard account**.

Participant Eligibility & Selection

We are seeking one hundred (100) student participants to complete this questionnaire. Participants will be selected to represent proportional pre-pandemic enrollment numbers for each faculty, as well as to represent the enrollment ratio of domestic- and international- students on campus.

Participants must have recently finished their first-year of undergraduate studies. Graduate students, transfer students, and students studying in the Island Medical Program, the Faculty of Law, or Continuing Studies are ineligible.

How to Participate

If you are interested in participating please fill out this **Interest to Participate in Research and Informed Consent** form by **Friday May 20th at 11:59PM (Pacific Time.)** Participants will be selected at random from this group based on ratios of faculty enrolment and student status.

Questions

If you have any questions, please email Angi Ross at angeddy@uvic.ca.

APPENDIX B: Expression of Interest to Participate in Research, Letter of Informed Consent

Interest to Participate in Research

Letter of Informed Consent

Please read the following Letter of Informed Consent. Research participants must consent to participating in research.

You are invited to participate in research being conducted for the Office of Student Life at the University of Victoria.

The Research Team
This study is being conducted remotely and on the traditional lək̓ʷəŋən Territories by principle researcher Angi Ross (she/her) who identifies as a white, cisgender woman of Western European ancestry. Angi Ross is a graduate student in the Faculty of Public Administration in the department Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria, and a Program Manager in the Office of Student Life at the University of Victoria. You may contact her if you have further questions by emailing angeddy@uvic.ca.

This study is being conducted for The Office of Student Life at the University of Victoria, and the findings will be reported to the Director, Kirsten McMenamie, who can be contacted at osldirector@uvic.ca. This research is being conducted, in part, to fulfill requirements for a Master of Arts in Community Development. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lynne Siemens who can be contacted at siemensl@uvic.ca.

The incentive for participating in this research is being funded by The Office of Student Life at the University of Victoria.

Purpose and Objectives
The purpose of this research project is to better understand how peer-mentorship programming might influence positive outcomes for UVic students. This research seeks to explore what new UVic students consider meaningful and valuable in a peer-mentor relationship. Findings are intended to support and inform the development of future peer-mentorship programs offered to new UVic students.

Participants Selection
Students who are interested in participating in this research must complete the this "Interest to Participate in Research" form, emailed to first-year UVic students on XX date.

- From the pool of interested students, up to one hundred (100) eligible participants will be selected at random to most closely reflect the ratio of enrollment numbers for domestic and international students studying at UVic ,and to most accurately reflect faculty enrollment numbers. This is based on September 2018, "pre-pandemic" enrollment ratios.
- Participants will be selected from the following faculties: Humanities, Science, Social Science, Education, Engineering & Computer Science, Human and Social Development, Peter Gustavson School of Business, and Fine Arts.
- Students enrolled in Law, the Island Medical Program, and Continuing Studies are ineligible for participation in this study.
- Transfer students and graduate students are ineligible for participation in this study.

What is involved
If you indicate interest and consent to voluntarily participate in this research, you will be informed if you are selected or not selected by XX date.

Your participation will include completing a questionnaire of 11 short-answer responses. You will be asked to reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and experiences at UVic throughout your first year. You will further be be asked to imagine what an "ideal" peer-mentorship program could look like for new UVic students.

Further, will be asked provide demographic information regarding your personal identity, including racial and ethnic identity, gender identity, and affinity for some equity seeking groups. This section is optional, but important in helping us understand how to best serve students from many different backgrounds and identities.

Risks
~~There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.~~ Participating in this research is considered low risk for participants. However, you will be asked to reflect on your experience throughout your first year at UVic which will include identifying "low points", which may be distressing for personal reasons. If you are experiencing distress, please consider the mental health resources available to you including SupportConnect, which is a free mental health support service available to UVic students 24/7. This service can also be accessed by students internationally.

Benefits
The potential benefits of your participation in this research include supporting the development of meaningful, peer-centered programs aimed at helping students at UVic achieve their personal goals.

Compensation
As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be given $15 of OneCard funds paid directly to your OneCard.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data may be impossible to remove from the study, as it is being collected anonymously. You will not be asked to return the 15$ OneCard funds applied to your OneCard account.

Anonymity
In terms of protecting your anonymity, the research will only require you to provide information absolutely necessary to determine eligibility for participation in the research. This includes providing an email address that you can be contacted at (does not have to be a UVic address)

Upon completing the questionnaire you will be given an option to provide your V00# and email address to facilitate the transfer for $15 to your OneCard, and this information will be collected and stored separately from questionnaire responses.

Detailed demographic and identity information will be requested as part of the questionnaire to help best understand the experience of many different groups of students on campus. Providing this information is optional for participants. Given the size of the UVic student body, students may be more easily identifiable when providing this information. It is up to each participant to choose what they are comfortable and feel safe disclosing. All efforts will be made to protect the anonymity of student data.

Confidentiality
Questionnaire responses ("data") will stored to a password protected file on a hard drive overseen by the Office of Student Life on a server at the University of Victoria. Both this form and the research survey are hosted on SurveyMonkey, which is licenced through UVic. Data is stored in Canada. Information collected through Survey Monkey will will include your email address, your V00#, and any responses you provide in the survey.

Dissemination of Results
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with the Office of Student Life and the University of Victoria Division of Student Affairs leadership team through a report and presentation. Further, findings for this research may be presented in conferences and/or published in academic journals. Finally, a copy of the Master's Project will be uploaded to the University of Victoria's D-Space and accessible on the internet.

Disposal of Data

1. By completing and submitting the questionnaire, **YOUR FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT IS IMPLIED** and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

I consent to voluntarily participating in this research project.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

2. What faculty are you enrolled in:

- [ ] Gustavson School of Business
- [ ] Science
- [ ] Social Science
- [ ] Humanities
- [ ] Engineering & Computer Science
- [ ] Fine Arts
- [ ] Human and Social Development
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Other (please specify)

3. What is your student status (select all that apply):

- [ ] Domestic (Canada) student
- [ ] International student
- [ ] Transfer Student (in-eligible for participation)
- [ ] First Year undergraduate student
- [ ] Upper year undergraduate student (in-eligible for participation)
- [ ] Graduate student (in-eligible for participation)

4. Participants will be emailed the survey on XX date and must complete it by XX date. Are you able to complete the survey within this date range?

- ◯ Yes, I can complete the survey within that date range
- ◯ No, I cannot complete the survey within that date range
- ◯ I am unsure if I can complete the survey within that date range

5. What is the **best email address** to contact you at:

Thank you for your interest in participating. You will be contacted by XX Date to confirm if you have or have not been selected to participate in this research (see selection criteria above).

APPENDIX C: Peer Mentorship Research Questionnaire

Copy of Peer Mentorship Research Questionnaire.
Converted from .PDF

This research aims to explore what would make a peer mentors program meaningful for new UVic students. Thank you for participating!

This questionnaire is 11 questions long, and you are asked to provide written answers (in sentences/paragraphs or bullet points). We estimate it will take you 20- 40 minutes to complete.

Section 1: Reflect

In this section, you will reflect on your thoughts and feelings before you began your studies at UVic.

Section 2: Identify

In this section, you will reflect on your experience of being a UVic student so far, and note impactful experiences.

Section 3: Imagine

In this section, you a will share your ideas, suggestions, and thoughts about what would make a peer mentor program meaningful for new students at UVic.

Section 4: Looking Forward

In this section you will compare what you believe now to what you believed before you began your studies at UVic.

After you have completed the survey, you will be asked to share some demographic information including faculty, student status, racial & ethnic identity, and gender identity. Identity information is optional to share.

This survey must be completed by June 1st, 2022 at 11:59PM (Pacific Time).

If you have any questions before you begin please contact the Researcher, Angi Ross, at angeddy@uvic.ca, or the Office of Student Life at studentlife@uvic.ca.

Section 1: Reflect

In this section, you will reflect on your **thoughts and feelings <u>before you began</u> your studies at UVic.**

Often when students prepare to attend university for the first time, they imagine what their experience will be like: what they will do, what they will learn, how they will perform, what types of people they will meet, and what opportunities or barriers the might encounter along the way.

Think back to the time right before you began studying at UVic.

Using bullet-points or sentences, identify some expectations, hopes, and fears or concerns you had before you began your studies at UVic. Please identify at least two (2) thoughts, or more, for each question.

1. What are some **expectations** you had? An expectation is an experience you believe will happen given the circumstances.

2. What are some **hopes** that you had? A hope is an experience you desire or want to happen.

3. What are some **fears** or **concerns** that you had? A fear or concern is an experience that would be undesired, or that causes anxiety or worry.

Section 2: Identify

In this section, you will reflect on **your experience of being a UVic student** so far, and note **impactful experiences**.

You may have experienced a variety of "high points" and "low points" throughout your first year at UVic.

A "**high point**" is an experience that you would consider positive. This could include movement towards your personal goals or hopes, achievements, connections and relationships, or opportunities.

A "**low point**" is an experience that you would consider negative. This could include experiences that set you back from your personal goals, unwanted academic outcomes, unmet hopes or expectations, or realized fears.

Think back to your student experience at UVic over the last academic year.

Please identify at least six (6) experiences, or more, split between the two sections. You do not have to write in each section. If relevant, please include when during the year you were experiencing this (ie. "in November" or "At the beginning of term 2" etc.)

4. What were some **"high points"** for you this year?

5. What were some **"low points"** for you this year?

Section 3: Imagine

In this section, you are asked to share your ideas, suggestions, and thoughts about **what would make a peer mentor program meaningful** for new students at UVic.

Note: This research project is not intended to be a program evaluation. Please do not provided feedback on existing mentorship programs currently offered at UVic (ie. New Student Connect, faculty-based mentorship programs,

etc.)

A **peer mentor** is an upper-year student who is matched with a new student (you, in this scenario) to provide support, information, and connection.

Imagine what an ideal peer mentor program would be like for you as first-year UVic student.

Using bullet-points or sentences, please write at least one (1) or more ideas or suggestions for each question.

6. Think back to your experience before you started at UVic:

If you were invited to participate in a peer mentor program: what type of 'expected experiences' or 'program outcomes' would make you want to sign up?

7. What should be considered when "matching" mentors with new students, and why?

8. Think back to your experience being a UVic student this year:

What would an ideal peer mentor relationship be like for you? How would communication and support look throughout your first year?

9. Imagine how a peer mentor could support you during the 'low points' of your year. What type of support would have felt most meaningful, beneficial, or valuable during those times?

10. Do you have any other thoughts, ideas, or suggestions about what would make a peer mentor program meaningful for new UVic students?

Section 4: Looking Forward

In this section you will **compare what you believe now** to **what you believed before you began your studies** at UVic.

Before you came to UVic you had certain hopes, expectations, fears and concerns.

Now that you have been a UVic student for a few terms, it is possible that they have been realized, adapted, or changed.

11. As your first year of university has come to an end: Have your hopes, expectations, fears or concerns for the remainder for your time as a UVic student changed at all? If so, how?

Demographics

The purpose of collecting racial, gender, and identity demographic information is equity-seeking. This information is being collected to assess whether students from equity seeking-groups identify particular qualities in a peer mentorship program to be more valuable, safe, or meaningful. The findings may be used to suggest what questions participants are asked before being paired with a mentor. Further, these findings may be used to suggest additional peer mentor training areas so that peer- mentors can better support students from equity seeking backgrounds. It is optional to answer questions regarding personal identity and demographics.

* 12. Faculty

- ◯ Gustavson School of Business
- ◯ Faculty of Education
- ◯ Faculty of Engineering & Computer Science
- ◯ Other (please specify)
- ◯ Faculty of Fine Arts
- ◯
- ◯ Faculty of Humanities
- ◯ Faculty of Law
- ◯
- ◯

- ☐ First-year student, direct entry from high school
- ☐ First-year student, took some time off
- ☐ Exchange/study abroad student
- ☐ Mature student (23+ years old at the time of entry)
- ☐ International student
- ☐ First term at UVic: September
- ☐ First term at UVic: May
- ☐ First term at UVic: January
- ☐ None of the above Prefer
- ☐ not to answer

* 14. Which of the following best described your living situation in your first-year?

- [ ] UVic student residence
- [ ] In Victoria (with parents, family, or guardians) In
- [ ] Victoria (alone or with roommates) Elsewhere in
- [ ] Canada
- [ ] Outside of Canada
- [ ] Other (please specify)

15. Which of the following do you identify as:

- [ ] Woman/Femme Man/Masc
- [ ] Non-Binary/Gender Non-Conforming Prefer
- [ ] not to answer
- [ ] None of the above, I identify as:

16. Do you identify as someone with trans experience?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Prefer not to answer

17. Please indicate any of the following that aligns with your identity:

- [ ] 2SLGBTQIA
- [ ]
- [ ] Person with a Disability or Disabilities Person
- [ ] with Lived Experience in Foster Care None of the
- [ ] above

18. How do you identify your ancestry? For the purpose of this survey, this self-identification is intended to capture your ancestry which may be different from one's birthplace, citizenship, or language. If you have multiple aspects of your ancestry, please indicate this by checking off **all** that apply.

- [ ] African/Black (e.g., African, African-American, African-Canadian, Afro-Caribbean, etc.)
- [ ] Arab (e.g., Algerian, Lebanese, Tunisian, etc.)
- [ ] East Asian (e.g., Chinese, including Hong Kong and Macau, Japanese, Korean, etc., and including Asian-Canadian, Asian-American, etc.)
- [ ] European/Non-white (e.g., Roma, etc.)
- [ ] European/White (e.g., Belgian, Croatian, English, Spanish, etc.)
- [ ] Filipina/Filipino
- [ ] Indigenous (outside of North America) Indigenous
- [ ] Metis
- [ ] I (also) identify as:
- [ ]
- [ ] First Nation Inuit
- [ ] Multiracial/Multiethnic/Multinational
- [ ] Latin, South or Central American (e.g. Brazilian, Chilean, Colombian, Mexican, etc.)
- [ ] South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc., and including Indo-Caribbean, Indo-African, Indo-Fijian, West Indian, etc.)
- [ ] Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese, etc.)
- [ ] West Asian (e.g. Iranian, Afghan, etc.) Prefer
- [ ] not to an

THANK YOU for completing this survey.

To ensure your anonymity, you will be directed to a separate page to enter the information needed to apply the $15 OneCard Funds to your UVic account. You will be asked to provide your email address and V00#.

CLICK HERE TO CLAIM YOUR OneCard FUNDS. You will be taken to a new window. Remember to come back to this page and select "end survey" to complete this questionnaire.

If you have any questions you can reach out to the primary researcher, Angi Ross, at angeddy@uvic.ca, or the Office of Student Life at studentlife@uvic.ca.

APPENDIX D: Information for Research Participant Compensation

Thank you for participating in this research!

We appreciate the time you spent completing the survey questionnaire! As compensation we will apply $15 to your OneCard account by XX Date. These funds can be used on UVic campus at various locations including: Dining Outlets, the UVic Book Store, many UVSS outlets and services, Vikes Athletics & CARSA, UVic Printing Services, and more. You can find more information about how and where you can use your OneCard Here!

Please note: to protect your anonymity we ask that you only provide your V00# and the same email address you used to participate in the research. We will use this email address to verify that you are the correct recipient of this compensation.

Please ensure that you have correctly typed your V00# and email address in the text box below.

You will receive an email once the transaction has been processed. If you have any trouble accessing your funds please email studentlife@uvic.ca by (XX Date + 2 weeks). You can view your OneCard account balance at www.uvic.ca/MyCard.

On XX Date + 2 Weeks your contact email and V00# will be deleted.

1. Please enter your email address. It must be the same address you used for the research questionnaire.

2. Please enter your V00# (UVic Student ID)