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BLUEPRINT FOR SELF-AUTHORSHIP: A CASE STUDY EXPLORATION OF A PEER  
MENTORING PROGRAM

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## ABSTRACT

As higher education professionals consider establishing or expanding mentoring programs as mediums through which to achieve student retention and success, particularly among certain student sub-populations, it is important to understand more about the effectiveness and best practices of current programs in the field. This research project is a case study of BLUEprint, a peer mentoring program coordinated by the Paul Robeson Cultural Center at The Pennsylvania State University, University Park campus. The study looks to understand the program's educational efforts and discern best practices that student affairs and higher education practitioners should take note of. This project captures programmatic experiences and milestones of academic and personal development noted by current participants. Aside from understanding the program as a case study of peer mentoring, research participants were assessed to gauge their level of self-authorship development, a student growth and development marker often noted in higher education literature as an assessment goal and key benchmarking item for student affairs programming.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

“We’re here for a reason. I believe a bit of the reason is to throw little torches out to lead people through the dark.” –Whoopi Goldberg.

Mentorship is an integral part academic and professional development, regardless of background, field of study, intended profession, age, demographics, etc. Just about anyone you ask will tell you about a mentor, or someone similar, who has taken the opportunity to throw little torches out to light their pathway.

This thesis aims to understand the case of growth experiences, particularly in self-authorship, of BLUEprint peer mentoring program members. It also exposes programmatic strengths of the organization that can hopefully be placed as examples of best-practice for other mentoring programs within higher education and student affairs. BLUEprint is one of the only formally organized peer mentoring groups on campus and is one of the most widely available and heavily supported official mentoring opportunities for University Park students. This project brings to light successes and learning moments of individual students, as well as some of the organizational and educational milestones and shortcomings faced by the program.

BLUEprint is a student organization and peer mentoring program supported by the Paul Robeson Cultural Center at Penn State University, known colloquially by university students and staff as “the PRCC”. Its mission is to “promote the well-being of first-year students, focusing on students of color, in order to encourage retention and successful persistence through Penn State. BLUEprint aims to assist freshmen and transfer/change-of-campus students with their

acclimation to a well-rounded social and academic environment at University Park through peer mentoring.” Although this organization has a history going back many years under numerous iterations, BLUEprint as it is organized and recognized today began in the fall semester of 2012, rebirthed by the then newly appointed PRCC Assistant Director Kristen Wong. What began as a fledgling group of twenty, almost ending after its first year, has grown into a group of over one hundred, thriving as both an officially registered student organization and a PRCC-supported program. BLUEprint engages mentees and mentors in leadership retreats, monthly enrichment sessions, social gatherings, and off-campus exploratory trips, all with the goal of helping first-year students make an easier transition into campus life at University Park, Penn State’s flagship campus with 43,000+ students, located in a small town in the heart of Central Pennsylvania.

As my involvement in student affairs grew and my desire to explore mentorship and its impact on student development persisted, connecting with BLUEprint made sense in order to allow this thesis project to have direct implications for informing current practice, which gave this project immediate purpose for myself and the program staff, who served as the true gatekeepers to this research.

Through my relationship with BLUEprint’s staff coordinator, Kristen Wong (Assistant Director of the PRCC at Penn State), I found a home for my research. BLUEprint provided an opportunity to explore a comprehensive peer mentoring program and to understand its influence and impact on the growth experiences of students of color at a PWI campus/university.

This thesis has been a medium through which to explore and better understand the encouraging effects and noteworthy efforts of one group that uses peer mentoring as a catalyst for personal growth and development, pushing students forward on a path of discovery, growth, and success, helping them to craft a BLUEprint for their undergraduate journey.



## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

Post-secondary institutions, and particularly their student affairs offices and professionals, work every day to identify and capitalize upon effective strategies for enhancing and ensuring student success. While this success is academic-focused, higher education professionals often seek to develop opportunities that shape a student's social, personal, and professional pathways as well, areas that ultimately circle back to retention and graduation. "In competition for recruitment and retention of students, colleges and universities offer a myriad of programs, support services, and resources" (Tremblay, 2003, p. 2). Mentoring is one such means to that end, one spoke within a giant myriad-wheel of resources.

This literature review looks at the intersection of peer mentoring programs in higher education, targeted mentoring, and equity/access issues within the higher education sphere to understand the current landscape of how peer mentoring is a key part of the fabric of student services and student affairs, particularly for students of color. This literature will also explore the student development theory of self-authorship, its presence in learning outcomes of student affairs programming and assessment, and how it has not yet been studied in conjunction with peer mentoring programs.

### **Equity & Access to Higher Education**

Increasing costs of higher education in conjunction with a stagnant economic climate have only increased the pressure felt by enrolled students and their institution's administrators to make the most out of a heavy investment of financial and time resources. Making a smooth

transition into college and staying long enough to walk across the stage for a diploma remains a persistent problem in higher education. The journey toward making a college degree a reality remains difficult, even more so for students of color, whose access and completion rates have long lagged behind White and Asian students (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003).

The history and current context of equity and access in higher education is crucial to understanding how increased student support services and programs, such as mentoring and BLUEprint, fit into the broader spectrum of institutional efforts. Researchers from the Association for the Study of Higher Education Institutes on Equity and Critical Policy Analysis (n.d.), committed to identifying and changing the educational policies and practices that sustain racial-ethnic inequities in higher education, frame equity as “creating opportunities for equal access and success in higher education among historically underrepresented student populations, such as ethnic minority and low-income students”. Student populations, administrators, and student affairs professionals significantly shift conversations and support of education equity, which is crucial to understanding the system of student support services and pre- and post-enrollment efforts. These researchers further break down equity into the following three buckets, each of which have a sense of individuality and overlap that create a complex web of concept and action.

**Table 1. Breakdown of Equity**

<b>1. Representational</b>	Proportional participation of historically underrepresented student populations at all levels of an institution
<b>2. Resource</b>	Takes account of the educational resources, when unequally distributed, that are directed at closing equity gaps
<b>3. Equity</b>	Involves institutional leaders and staff demonstrating an awareness and a willingness to address equity issues

(The Ashe Institutes on Equity and Critical Policy Analysis website, n.d.)

As the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century roared into focus, modern life and an opportunity in the middle class became a greater reality in American life. Increased economic opportunity and a new social structure ushered in a viewpoint of “education as a necessary component of the nation’s ideal as a ‘land of opportunity’” (Eckel & King, 2004, p. III). Institutional efforts to help students access and succeed in post-secondary education has only been a focus of the past half-century at the most. According to the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education (2015), while equity was not a focus in higher education until the late 1980s and early 1990s when many institutions dedicated offices to equity, “the U.S. has a core constitutional and founding commitment to equality of opportunity for all citizens, [as outlined in] a body of court decisions guarantee[ing] equal access to education of all citizens...” (p. 5). Increased student services and support programs run by student affairs have come about as a way to address this inequity. Mentoring is one of program format that came about within the student affairs profession to address issues of equity and to assist students who need more support for a successful transition to college and university life.

### **Peer Mentoring**

The original meaning of the word mentor refers to a father figure who sponsors, guides, and develops a younger person. Throughout history, mentors have played a significant role in teaching, inducting, and developing the skills and talents of others (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004, p. 519). Mentoring has traditionally existed as informal relationships, started by chance or proximity. Only recently have organizations, corporations, government, and educational institutions created formal and structured mentoring programs. While mentorship, formal and informal, has proliferated and continues to be touted as a useful tool in guiding others toward

success, Jacobi (1991), in an extensive review of mentoring literature, points to a lack of a “widely accepted operational definition of mentoring”. This has made research around mentoring difficult to generalize, and the metrics for measuring success remain quite varied and inconsistent.

An extensive amount of literature examines the effectiveness of mentoring as a tool for smooth transition into college, long-term student development, and individual success, particularly when targeted at particular student sub-populations. Egege (2015) argues that “While not exactly a ‘silver bullet,’ peer mentoring appears to be the single most effective way to prevent attrition and low satisfaction rates. It also has the potential for the early identification of students who may be at risk of disengaging or failing” (p. 266). When asking people about whether they have a mentor in their life, most cite any number of influential individuals, from professional colleagues to older siblings to former teachers.

While it is true that mentorship may come from in numerous forms, formal, structured mentoring programs similar to BLUEprint are the focus of the literature review. Ehrich et al. (2004), in an overview of formal mentoring programs, identify four most frequently cited positive outcomes of a mentee/mentor relationship, within the educational context – (1) support, empathy, friendship; (2) help with strategies, subject knowledge; (3) discussion, advice, sharing; (4) feedback, constructive criticism (p. 524). These, along with other outcomes, will be explored through this thesis.

Numerous studies have been published exploring examples of peer mentoring, including programs with students of color or another campus minority student group as the primary participants. Good, Haplin, & Haplin (2000) explored a peer mentoring program for pre-engineering African American students who attended a large, land-grant institution. They found

“academic growth, interpersonal gains, and grade point averages & retention” to be the most salient themes that emerged from their analysis of student journal entries. Other scholars (Brittian, Sy, & Stokes 2009; McAllister, Harold, Ahmedani, & Cramer 2009; Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón 2007; Trevino, Hite, Hallam, & Ferrin 2014) have explored multiple examples of peer mentoring retention programs and the experiences of participating American Indian, African American, and LGBT students, respectively. This literature justifies the creation and existence of programs such as BLUEprint, while also exploring the influence of particular ideas around racial identity development, acculturative stress, and other university environmental components. However, these studies did not specifically search for moments of self-authorship development or other meaning-making occurring as a result of intentional programmatic efforts.

### **Self-Authorship**

Self-authorship, defined as an “internal capacity to generate one’s own views on the world, oneself, and relationships with others” is a student development theory and component of meaning-making, most extensively researched in higher education and student affairs literature by Marcia Baxter-Magolda (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Although much of the literature shows that meaning-making ability usually does not fully develop until post-graduation, some studies have attempted to identify particular programs or experiences that may contribute to or create opportunities to encourage and accelerate this process in students. “Baxter Magolda (2001, 2009) describes the developmental process toward self-authorship as a journey in which people progress along a continuum from external to internal forms of meaning making.”

Movement along this continuum of self-authorship focuses on a change in the source of one’s beliefs and self-image. Through this movement, students answer the questions ‘How do I

know?’ ‘Who Am I?’ and ‘How do I want to construct relationships with others?’ Since BLUEprint focuses on assisting student transition onto the University Park campus, I posit that time spent in the program contributes to movement through the three stages of self-authorship development. As one progresses through the stages, who individuals rely on for their meaning-making moves first from external authorities, second to a ‘crossroads’, and third to actual self-authorship (Barber & King, 2014, p. 434).

The central purpose of this study is to explore a case of growth experiences and possible self-authorship development within student members of the BLUEprint peer mentoring program. Conclusions from this study may validate and affirm how the program may currently serve students, as well as identify for program staff areas of possible improvement. The three primary questions addressed in this study are:

1. What are the growth experiences of BLUEprint members?
2. What do students identify as the benefits or personal gains of program participation?
3. How does program participation encourage self-authorship in members?

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Conceptual Framework**

Given the importance of understanding the overall trajectory of student development, in conjunction with the influence of BLUEprint on that development, the conceptual framework draws from two existing theories, Astin's I-E-O model and Chickering & Resiser's vectors of identity development, to explain the experiences, changes, learning moments, and realizations that students had as a result of their involvement with BLUEprint.

Astin's (1991) Inputs-Environment-Outputs (I-E-O) model is leveraged to consider the relationships between BLUEprint members (inputs), their experiences within BLUEprint (the environment), and their development of self-authorship and other learning outcomes (outputs). Chickering & Resiser's (1993) framework of identity development explores seven vectors, or tasks, that students experience during their undergraduate career. Each vector has direction and magnitude, meaning that a student may work through more than one vector concurrently, but only one is the central focus at any given time. They are not rapidly accomplished and usually require some type of repeated exposure to take firm internal hold.

Astin's (1991) I-E-O model is frequently used in the higher education literature to help explain undergraduate learning and personal development in college (Hu and Kuh, 2003). Student inputs refer to the "personal qualities the student brings initially to the educational program", the college environment consists of the "student's actual experiences during the educational program", and the student output refers to the "talents" that college influence or try to influence such as knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Astin, 1991, p. 18). The I-E-O

model argues that student affairs educational programming assessment should include information on student inputs, the educational environment, and student outcomes, arguing that students from the same environment may experience different outcomes as a result of their pre-college experiences, which should be taken into consideration in program planning.

The I-E-O model does not provide clear understanding or theoretical space to acknowledge variation within the environment or how an individual's experience within the environment may be influenced by intensive involvement with one particular group or program. It is also important to acknowledge that the structure of both the university and the peer mentoring program does create some experience consistency across individuals and cohorts. The I-E-O model theorizes that experiences before and during students' time at Penn State and in BLUEprint play a role in shaping their lived experiences and impacting their movement along the continuum of self-authorship and identity development.

This study does not exclusively measure the effects of student inputs on their environment, as the model is typically used, but rather how the peer mentoring program, as a central component of the environment, influences change or development in student characteristics throughout the college career (see block 'C' of I-E-O model). The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 1) posits that self-authorship emerges as a result of the environment to then influence the change of inputs to outputs. BLUEprint's students claim a wide array of personal identities and backgrounds. Their pre-college experiences will undoubtedly shape their interaction with the environment at Penn State and within BLUEprint.

While the university and its programs look to intentionally shape the environment, Astin's model neither wholly accounts for the overlap of multiple environments nor for the variation of experience within that environment, particularly based on student inputs. It is also

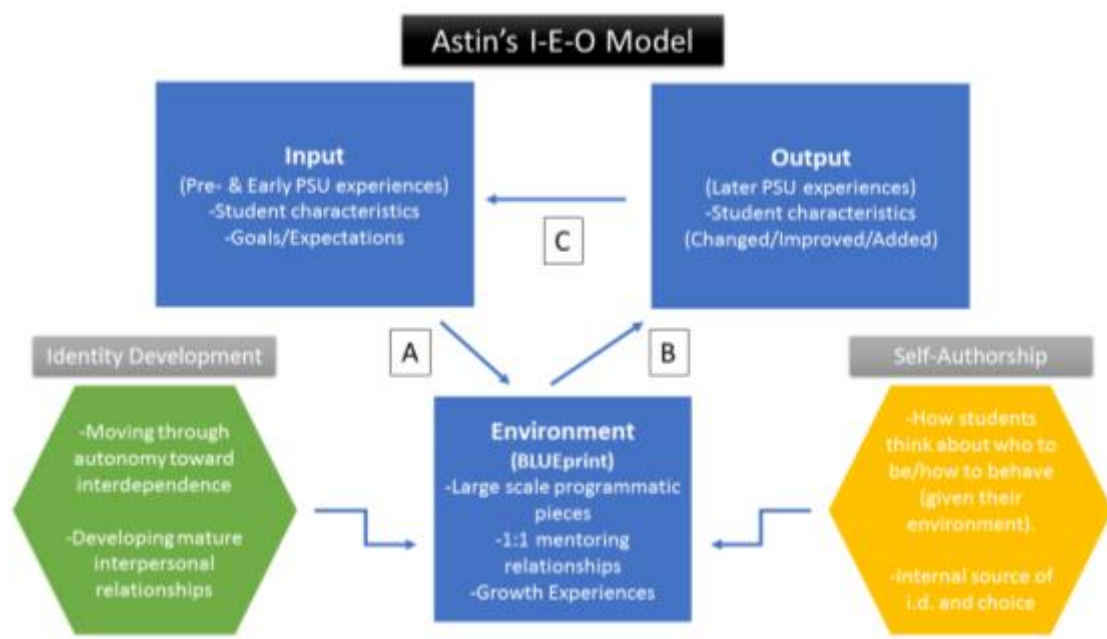


important to recognize that while the university has great power in creating the environment, change is often impeded by institutional history and weight, particularly at large and storied institutions like Penn State.

Chickering & Resiser's (1993) theory of identity development explains the tasks, or development projects, a student explores regarding identity and interpersonal interactions during their undergraduate tenure. The vectors, in developmental order, are developing confidence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

A majority of students entering BLUEprint as first-year students stay in the program through their upper-class years, meaning their movement through multiple vectors may be accelerated because of the program structure and the high level of interpersonal interaction. Attention to these development vectors, particularly moving through autonomy toward interdependence and developing mature interpersonal relationships, provides clarity of how the environment may encourage and create identity and meaning-making growth experiences.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**



## **Chapter 4 Data & Methodology**

### **Program Background**

BLUEprint is a structured, peer mentoring program that pairs first-year, transfer, and change-of-campus undergraduates, primarily students of color, with upper-class mentors who aim to ease the transition to University Park. This program is funded and organized both as a recognized student organization within the university's Student Activities Office, and as a programming unit of a Division of Student Affairs office, the Paul Robeson Cultural Center (PRCC). Professional personnel who directly support the program include the PRCC's assistant director, two graduate assistants, and the office manager. The program, because of its designation as a student organization, also maintains student leadership in the form of a planning committee (or PC, as it's referred to by members), which include roles such as mentee coordinator, mentor coordinator, PR/Outreach Chair, and more.

Current student mentors are assigned a first-year, transfer, or change-of-campus student mentee with whom they spend a required 4-6 hours per month of one-on-one time, as well as monthly social meeting with their assigned BLUEprint family. This structural component of the program places mentee/mentor pairs into family groups of 15-20, as a way to make an organization of 101 feel smaller and provide a direct and intentional network of mentees and mentors outside of the one-on-one relationships. In order to maintain one's accreditation and active status, you are expected to attend mentee program enrichment sessions, mentor leadership development retreats, off-campus exploratory trips, have family meetings, and fulfill 'hours' for meeting as a mentee-mentor pair.

## Data Collection

This study’s research questions look to understand the growth experiences of BLUEprint members, what students identify as the benefits and personal gains of program participation, and how program participation might encourage self-authorship in members. A narrative approach to a qualitative case study examines the growth experiences of the BLUEprint peer mentoring program’s student members. The case also looks to examine some of the dynamics of the program to identify best practices and notable areas of the programmatic pieces of the organization. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews of mentors and observations of BLUEprint group meetings. This project was approved by Penn State’s Office of Research Protections and the Institutional Review Board (STUDY00006619).

**Table 2. Data Sources**

<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Observations</b>
17 BLUEprint mentors	Passing the Torch (BP Week: Public Enrichment Session)
	Personal Safety & Self-Defense (BP Week: Public Enrichment Session)
	Paint Nite (BP Week: Public Enrichment Session)

### Observations

Observations (N = 3) were conducted on a series of public events called “BLUEprint Week”. Held annually by the organization, this event week celebrates peer mentoring and provides campus community members an opportunity to experience the organization’s work and interact with its membership. All membership meetings are closed to the general public outside of this week.

I observed three of the five scheduled events that week to gather perspective about the group dynamic of the organization. I wanted to have an opportunity to see if the same people were attending each event, how and if visitors were acknowledged in these public events, and the ratio of member to non-member attendees. This ratio was an assumed estimate based on individuals who I personally recognized, people who were wearing BLUEprint apparel, and people who interacted with the event organizers in a very familiar or collegial manner. These observations also served to make myself as a researcher more familiar to the BLUEprint general body.

Two of the three observed events were set-up as enrichment sessions, mirroring the educational programming that mentees encounter each month, and the other simply a social gathering. The enrichment sessions frame the mentees' monthly meetings and align with the academic year curriculum developed by program staff. Individual member interviews surfaced how enrichment sessions impacted their time at Penn State, how they conduct themselves as a student, and what new skills, ideas, and understanding they carry with them as a result of attending. Therefore, these public events follow the same format as the mentee enrichment sessions in order to provide the non-members in attendance with a taste of the program's learning opportunities. I did write brief memos following each observational encounter for recall and to, if applicable, make accurate connections to interview data.

The first public enrichment session observed, "Personal Safety & Self-Defense", taught attendees the basics of how to maintain a level of safety in their everyday lives, as well as tactics and awareness to help reduce any possible threat. The researcher acted as a strict observer in this session, which was easily facilitated by the auditorium room set-up and the lecture style presentation. Notes were easily taken during this event on the quality of the information

presented, possible influence of the room set-up, and attendance. The session was supposed to have been led by a member of the university police force, but due to a last-minute schedule change, PRCC office personnel delivered an in-the-moment version. At first, I was confused as to the reasoning behind hosting an enrichment session on personal safety. Obviously, there is utility in having knowledge and ideas around how to maintain one's safety, but I still questioned as to why this topic out of so many possibilities. Typically, they aim to cover topics that students would not otherwise receive information on or discuss as a group within other academic or co-curricular endeavors.

The second public enrichment session observed, "Passing the Torch", focused on informing attendees of how they can return to their high schools and home communities to make an impact on upcoming generations. The session encouraged attendees to use their own college experience, knowledge (institutional, academic, professional), and their networks to "pass the torch" to the younger generations, especially to increase the rate of college-bound and college-successful peers. The event was led by members of the Planning Committee (exec. board) of the organization likely serves two, intentional purposes.

First, member-led events so provide those presenters an opportunity to take personal leadership risk, it places them in public speaking settings, and shows mentees and other attendees what their peers (possibly mentors) are passionate about and engaged in. Second is that, after a brief survey of the crowd, most of the students came from either suburban or urban districts, and a majority of the room indicated that 50% or less of the students in their high school attended college. Having the crowd understand the backgrounds and experiences of everyone in the room helped the conversation remain relevant to all in attendance that evening. Integrating a survey of event attendee background and perspective is an indicator of the student leaders' efforts to make

programming, public or otherwise, relevant to the receiving party. This also helps students to see that others in the room may share pieces of their personal story.

The third public enrichment session observed, “Paint Nite”, was a social and arts/crafts evening that closed the week-long series. This event was set-up primarily as a social outlet to provide an opportunity for attendees to meet new people and understand the family dynamic of BLUEprint, a feature of the organization that arises time and time again during interview conversations. Because of the highly interactive and social aspect of this event, the researcher was an active participant in the painting and socializing with table mates. No notes were taken during the event, but rather I wrote a reaction memo at its conclusion.

Attendees were randomly assigned to a table of 8-10 people who became our “family” for the evening. We sat down to find three canvases. On the first canvas, the groups were to come up with a family name, place that in the middle, and then add representations of our family’s values (which we discussed as a group) around the edges. For the second, each family member painted a representation of themselves. The third canvas was freestyle, as long as it represented the family in some way. Below are photos of our family’s art collection from the evening.



Figure 4. Family Choice Canvas



Figure 3. Family Name & Values



Figure 2. Individual Family Member Representations

### *Participants*

In total, (N = 17) current BLUEprint mentors were interviewed, all upper-class division, undergraduate students. Students varied in their length of involvement with the organization, from all five years of their time at Penn State to this being their first year. Most mentors had started in BLUEprint as mentees, then transitioning into the mentor role during their sophomore year and often remaining until senior year. Most mentors in the organization were former mentees, but external mentor applications are available each year. Therefore, three of the interviewees entered the program directly as mentors. Only one of the interviewed students was international.

### *Procedures*

Interviewees were gathered by the principal investigator (PI), who with permission from the BLUEprint staff coordinator, attended the mentor cohort monthly meeting to place a call for volunteers. In addition to this in-person request, the BLUEprint program coordinating staff member also reminded students of the interview opportunity at additional meetings and through mass communication reminders via membership email listserv and the org's GroupMe, a smartphone messaging application. The principal investigator attended a second mentor meeting asking for volunteers, after which a large number of people signed-up for interviews.

Although originally looking to interview both mentees and mentors, I reached out to mentors first because of their assumed greater institutional knowledge, breadth of experience within the program, and assumed willingness to participate because of greater investment in the program. Out of the 54 mentors in the program, 19 agreed to participate and 17 were interviewed. Sign-ups occurred physically at the mentor meeting because of the ease of allowing them to choose the meeting time and place, but this method did exclude anyone who did not

attend either meeting from being interviewed, although unlikely that they missed two months in a row.

After self-selection, the mentors participated in one, individual, semi-structured 30 to 45-minute interview with the principal investigator to discuss experiences of being in the program and explore specific moments of learning and development during their tenure as a mentee, mentor, and/or planning committee member. The selection of interview questions and the structure of the interview process was influenced by Baxter Magolda's *Interview Strategies for Assessing Self-Authorship: Constructing Conversations to Assess Meaning Making* (2007). This article discussed interview protocol design for two studies Baxter-Magolda conducted to assess self-authorship, particularly how to identify indicators of self-authorship within respondent answers, how to keep the conversation moving, and understanding the boundaries of interviewer inquiry and interview time in gleaning these internal experiences. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews occurred in a variety of on-campus settings, including the university library, residential commons building, business classroom building, and the Paul Robeson Cultural Center. These locations were chosen for location convenience for both the researcher and the interviewee, as well as the availability of a quiet and private interview space.

### **Validity**

Given the reliance on interviews and observations, limited opportunities for observations, and the narrow time frame of interview conduction, several validity threats and limitations are present within the study. With regard to interviews, the extent to which the interview sample is representative of the entire BLUEprint membership is limited. It is possible that the sample of students who self-selected to be interviewed could have unintentionally narrowed or focused the response data, particularly because the only parameters for interview participation were current



membership in BLUEprint and 18+ years of age. Additionally, the interview data only represents the mentor perspective, and while many started in the organization as mentees, their perspective on the organization and their experiences at Penn State is impacted by their tenure in the group. Mentee interviews might provide a narrower, but useful information on how programming is received, what connections are made, and specifically what learning might occur in that first year alone.

Further, the truthfulness of responses given by interviewees, as well as the ability to accurately interpret and present these responses, may threaten validity. This is due to the fact that I did not know most of the students very well and often many of the questions asked about personal or very internal aspects of their overall lives and their time in BLUEprint. Nevertheless, I am confident in my ability to build quick rapport. Also, no student refused to answer a question or appeared visibly uncomfortable during the interview.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Coding & Memos**

A majority of the data used and the results gleaned from this study came from the semi-structured member interviews. After the interviews were transcribed, I analyzed the transcripts in a top-down, deductive approach, looking for linkages to the theories outlined in the conceptual framework. The interview data codes were developed from recurring key-phrases outlined in the transcript, paying close attention to those that were possible indicators of self-authorship or vectors of identity development. Codes linked to the conceptual framework included “used to, but now” statements, or ones with similar wording, and quotes that made note of dynamic and distinct shifts in thought or ideals from home or pre-college to now or other university-based

moments. I also noted any respondent quote that linked closely with development, challenge, or change of a personal identity trait, particularly while in or because of BLUEprint.

Simultaneously, I made notes regarding other recurring growth experiences and other developmental indicators, as well as patterns of statements regarding particular components of the mentoring program itself. While not central to answering the research questions, paying close attention to student comments regarding the program structure and educational components, provides an insider perspective for program administrators and allows the study to serve as a tool for improvement area identification and affirmation of what is working well for students.

After each interview and observation conducted, I wrote a reflection memo to combine with any notes taken during the actual encounter. These memos were key to not only keeping track of my own thoughts and reflections, but also providing ability to better triangulate the overall dataset and plan for the most beneficial and needed future data sources.

In addition to data collection memos, a researcher identity memo (Appendix B) provides background on how I came to do this project, what my relationship is to the mentoring program and its staff and members, and most importantly, how my personal identity, connections on campus, and my own experience at Penn State influenced my decision to pursue this study. The identity memo helped me to clarify my position with the research project, the program, and its members. Some of the aspects of my journey at Penn State, certain personal and professional relationships, and my own personal identity placed me closer to this group than I otherwise would have been. This added level of familiarity and comfort in the group assisted in building rapport with individual members, gaining the support of program staff, and addressing any questioning of my place as a white male researching a program focused on students of color.

## **Limitations**

There were a number of limitations present in this research. First and foremost, I was unable to follow the group for an entire academic year or longer, as well as do interviews and data collection by cohort years. In order to be more definitive regarding the development of self-authorship through and because of BLUEprint, one would need to spend more time within a particular cohort of members and track their development throughout their undergraduate career. Nevertheless, some of the statements made by the interviewees hinted toward placement somewhere along the self-authorship development continuum.

I was also only able to interview mentors, and while their longer tenure in the program provided rich data, lacking the perspective of first-year mentees excludes any useful feedback and insight into programmatic components. Additionally, some of the statements made in interviews could have been more definitive had a large sample size of the 101-person program been taken, rather than the 17 who were interviewed.

## Chapter 5

### Results

“BLUEprint’s mission is to promote the well-being of first-year students, focusing on students of color, in order to encourage retention and successful persistence through Penn State. It aims to assist...with their acclimation to a well-rounded social and academic environment.” The results of this study demonstrate how and where the organization’s central goal is currently accomplished, what growth experiences members cite as significant, and how the results of this individual case provide insight into how identity development and self-authorship occur within and because of this environment.

#### Student Growth Experiences

Numerous interview encounters indicated that students currently or have previously moved through the indicated vectors of identity development. There were also signals that students could be moving toward self-authorship, a theory that answers the questions: How do I know? Who Am I? How do I want to construct relationships with others?

#### Self-Authorship (“Used to, but now...”)

It is difficult to definitively pinpoint a growth experience as being an example of self-authorship, mainly because this study provides no perspective to the researcher on where the student started along the self-authorship continuum. Nevertheless, many students made statements in an “I used to..., but now I...” format regarding a change in thought or perspective since being in BLUEprint and at Penn State, asking ‘how do I know?’. Colin, a junior, third-year

member, who identifies as black, recalls how his ideas of the world around him began to evolve in his late high school years and how that evolution accelerated once he arrived on campus.

Coming into college, looking back, I would consider myself pretty socially aware of things. I was entering a critical social consciousness. I would start to question the world around me. Why is it that we're taking the train through the ghetto? Why is the ghetto the way it is? BLUEprint had a lot of events that would talk about social justice, these other issues that had to deal with social issues.

Colin talked about how the characteristics of his home life, watching his mother's experiences, and his hometown itself inspired this curiosity. He also mentioned discussion and empowerment groups that provide space for considering 'who am I?'

We usually have these empowerment discussion groups. What it means to be a man, blackness, being a person of color at a predominately white institution. Code switching, that's one of my favorites. Inevitably, my thought process has changed over the years. I can't pinpoint exact moments, but it definitely has. I have interacted with different people and ideas. We've been to difference places. Over the spring break trip, we went to museums that were not for us, so we can see how the other side learns about their history, where they said things like 'slaves were paid well and fed well'.

While this student had a shift in how his surrounding environment was formed and through BLUEprint was provided an opportunity to explore his internal sense of self, Margaret, a sophomore, first-year mentor, talked about how BLUEprint as an organization, and because of its programmatic components, pushed her to challenge the labels she had given herself and others had affirmed. She talks specifically about realizing that her introvert tendencies do not prohibit her from making connections with her mentee and others in the organization as she expected.

I learned that I like to talk to people and to communicate. I used to label myself as an introvert and not really liking to talk to people and stuff like that. I love getting to know people and hear their experiences, which BLUEprint kind of forced me to do.

### *New Awareness*

Students come into the university with a wide variety of input characteristics, many of which are quite definitive such as demographic characteristics, but others that are a result of their

hometown, upbringing, time in secondary school, or parents and family members are likely to be influenced heavily by their college environment. As these students entered Penn State and BLUEprint, they have developed a new level of awareness about issues, identity, others, and most importantly, themselves.

Two students talked about a volunteer opportunity in a middle school and high school that occurred as a component of a spring break exploratory trip. As university funding became more consistent, these off-campus exploratory spring break trips have become a central educational component of the program with each trip having a central theme that guides the travel itinerary for the week. Each trip concludes with a service day that traditionally happens at public schools. Both interviewees, although recalling different trips and different schools, had a younger student at the volunteer site open up to them in unexpected ways, challenging them to reconsider their capabilities, impact, or previously held notions.

The first student, Gabriel, a sophomore mentor from Ghana, recalls an experience during the group's spring break trip through the US southeast in 2015. He talks about being very nervous prior to meeting and working with his high school student during a school volunteer day in South Carolina, not knowing if he was going to be able to contribute anything of value to their interaction, even saying that he originally would have preferred to avoid the volunteer day entirely.

The very first one (spring break trip) was when I was more reserved. We had to go to this school and talk to a high school kid. I was nervous, so if there was a way that I could skip this, I'd gladly do it. Then the girl came in and she said she's nervous. I literally said, "That's good cause I'm nervous too!" Then she started laughing and from that point we started talking about literally everything and she ended up telling me all about her life. She ended up crying at the end because she said nobody has ever sat down to listen and talk to her. Then when we were leaving, she came back to hug me and everybody (in BLUEprint) was like, what? I think that's when everybody started looking at me differently. That's when I realized I can talk to people. When I thought I couldn't, I realized I can... and I can listen. I always have a solution, someday, somehow.

Colin recalls a similar instance from the 2016 spring break trip where the group spent their volunteer day at a school in Tennessee that showed him, similar to Gabriel, how he can have an impact in unexpected ways, by listening and simply being himself.

We went to this middle school and this girl actually walked up to me and wanted to say hi. She ended up telling me that sometimes she doesn't fit in and I was talking to her about it for the rest of recess, cause growing up I wasn't always the kid that fit in anywhere too. Sometimes that's not a bad thing. She smiled at me and said thank you, and wanted to give me a hug. That kind of made my heart melt.

Both Colin and Gabriel understood the value of remaining true to themselves and what power exists in taking a moment to listen to others and be present, which is something they likely do on campus as mentors, but do not necessarily receive such immediate feedback. These interview notes point toward both managing emotions and developing mature interpersonal relationships within the vectors of identity development framework. These developmental moments frame the environment that students experience in BLUEprint.

### *Sense of Home, Belonging, & Support (Combats Isolationism)*

Frequently, students discussed feeling lost, overwhelmed, or alone, particularly during their first moments on campus at Penn State. The source of these feelings included the location of the university, the size of the university, struggles with home life, stark demographic shifts from their hometown or high school, and a struggle to find people who either looked like and/or could relate to them. Hudson, a sophomore second-year member from Africa, says that even though his home is only about 90 minutes from campus, he finds comfort in “having a home away from home. Having people...there’s a decent amount of people who are Africans in BLUEprint. You don’t feel like you’re lost. People will come and check on you, even for no reason.”

Some just simply wanted to have familiar faces and friendships on a large and sometimes disorienting campus. Jillian, also a sophomore second-year member who identifies as African American, talked extensively about her BLUEprint relationships being a defining factor in what kept her at Penn State, saying “There were other people my year that I could get to know and other mentors one year ahead of me, so I could ask all of my questions.” Jillian grew up in Pennsylvania and had family members who attended the university, so she ended up deciding to study at Penn State even though that was not her original intent. She talked about how alone she felt her freshman year and how difficult it was to watch high school friends on social media having a blast at college. She did not feel the same, but BLUEprint has turned around her Penn State experience and completely diminished her thoughts of disconnect and wanting to leave.

The program should take pride in knowing that, as stated in its mission, it provides a strong network of support that quickly envelopes newly-arrived students, and does so inclusive of the plethora of individual needs each cohort member brings.

### *Multicultural Identity & Life at PSU*

The mentoring program, as stated in its mission/description, serves primarily students of color and is also housed within the campus cultural center. Therefore, identity is a central component, both directly and indirectly, of the students, the program, and the office. Many students discussed how either their own identities have been challenged, they have found a home in the PRCC and BLUEprint, or how they are more aware of their own identity and the identity of those around them. Tanya, a senior mentor who identifies as African American, serves on the org’s planning committee and talks about how her involvement helped her to challenge her previous understanding. “...what I thought I knew about other cultures. I didn’t go to a diverse



high school, so I didn't really have interactions with people from the Latinx or Asian backgrounds. Stereotypes, micro-aggressions, that's all I knew.”

For Adanna, a junior third-year member who identifies as Latina, BLUEprint became a place of both challenge and comfort when it came to her racial/ethnic identity and finding a place on campus.

That's what I like about BLUEprint since it's not focused on culture to belong. Otherwise I'd feel super uncomfortable cause I tried joining cultural orgs, but I never fit that stereotype of being Latina or being Caribbean, so I never felt comfortable. Like enough. This one girl was like, "Who's this black girl at our meetings?" Little did they know, I grew up in a Dominican household. That's my dominant culture. They would talk in Spanish and assume that I don't know. I understand you! That was rough and then with CSA (Caribbean Student Assoc.), my dad's an immigrant, but he wasn't a heavy influence to my house since he was always travelling. It was hard to have your dominant culture denied by everybody. I needed to find something that wasn't culture-based, but could still be around people that I'm comfortable with.

While Adanna found a home for her identity in BLUEprint because it did not focus on a particular background or culture, others found a home in the organization specifically because it provides a community of other minority students. Hudson noted how “BLUEprint’s a really involved organization and a big one for minority students on campus”, telling me that most of the minority students on campus know this and how influential of a factor that was in both his initial draw to the organization and his decision to remain involved.

Interviewees discussed how BLUEprint fits into the large fabric of multicultural student organizations and student life on campus. Tanya, a long-time member of BLUEprint, and undoubtedly one of the most committed students to the organization that I interviewed, even recalled having to challenge herself during the early moments in her Penn State career to break out of the circle of multicultural groups.

When you get caught up in a bunch of multicultural orgs, you think that that's all there is to Penn State and that's all you need interact with because that's who you know and who

you're comfortable with. But...I realized that I needed to...branch out to organizations that were a little less diverse than what I was accustomed to.

For Tanya and some others, identity became a very salient piece of their college experience, mainly as a result of their previous environment and the transition into the current one at Penn State. Tanya felt she was on a campus that felt unwelcoming and strange, but her the multicultural student orgs and community, as well as BLUEprint became a source of exploration, affirmation, and questioning. Tanya decided that while she had found comfort in those spaces, she needed to challenge herself to move outside of that and get involved with other organizations that were not identity based, such as one's related to a special interest or her academic and professional pathway.

### Role Modelling

Most mentoring literature discusses the impact of role modelling on the mentoring relationship, noting that mentors are most often senior or more experienced to their mentee in some way, whether by actual age or institutional tenure. Therefore, it was no surprise that role modelling within both individual member relationships and the entire program membership came up in conversation frequently. Take Tanya's recollection of her mentor. "She was an awesome role model, seeing her work in all these different volumes, whether it was being a mentor, an ARHS member, being involved in Greek life, or in the Schreyer Honors College. Seeing her do all of these things really pushed me to do better and more on campus."

Not only does BLUEprint provide mentees with upper-class peer role models to emulate, but it pushes mentors into the role modelling spotlight. Having someone look up to them can be enlightening for mentors, especially those for whom this role and feeling is completely new.

Colin describes his experience of this new feeling.

I learned how much people actually look up to me and value my leadership, my presence. Having that role switched. People would say "A lot of people look up to you." I wasn't used to that, but it was a good feeling. It made me realize that I've been the youngest my whole life and now it's maybe my turn to give back and lead by example.

Role model expectations challenge mentors to stay on top of their individual behavior and it creates a culture of success, accountability, and responsibility within the overall organization.

We all hold each other accountable. We're all trying to be leaders, but we all know that we're following something, which are our dreams and our goals. I think we only get there by the people that surround us. We surround ourselves with people who are also chasing goals, elevating each other at the same time. Picking each other up when we fall, praising each other when somebody steps up, not putting them down. Watching people succeed and helping others do the same.

Mentors also find moments of growth and self-realizations through their time counseling others.

Beltman & Schaeben (2012) found similar sentiment in a study they conducted of a peer mentoring program, stating "Mentors primarily reported a sense of achievement and satisfaction in their role of assisting new students. They also developed skills for their personal and professional lives, and appreciated the opportunity for leadership experience and development."

Aside from students' growth along the continuum of self-authorship development and within Chickering's vectors of identity development, additional indicators of growth experience appeared throughout the study, including racial/ethnic identity and the belonging and support members find within the program, both providing insight into interviewees' lives within the context of the mentoring program and the broader campus community. In addition to individual development, interviewees had thoughts regarding structural components of the program itself, providing an opportunity for insider feedback for program administrators.

### **Program-specific Components**

BLUEprint holds its central goal as assisting students with their transition to the University Park campus, and in order to accomplish that, makes many intentional decisions

regarding the overall co-curricular structure of the program, including presenting educational content (enrichment sessions and off-campus trips), setting learning outcomes, providing structure and expectation for students (monthly family meetings, mentor/mentee hours expectation and interaction logs, mentee and mentor cohort meetings), and making decisions regarding the organizational framework of the group (family component and cohort meetings). Many of these program design choices have lasting positive impact on student experience and accomplish a number of goals. At the same time, there are components of the program's administration that have unintended consequences or students see them as simply needing slight adjustment of some form.

#### Family (organizational structure)

One of the most talked-about topics in the interviews were the BLUEprint families, which are a central component of the program's social structure. These are basically smaller, assigned groups that members are a part of within the overall organization. You are assigned a family by program staff and members have a monthly meeting requirement with their family. Since the program has grown to over 100 members, families have become a way to maintain the dynamic, connection, intimacy, and accountability of a smaller group. Hudson noted that "It does its intended thing, to make the organization, which is so large, much smaller. You can take the time to get to know others in your family, instead of just looking at it like there are so many people." Not only does the family aspect shrink the organization, but it also creates buy-in, stability, and belonging for members, such as a second-year who told me he "Honestly, at first didn't want to stay involved, but it's the first family [that kept me in]."

Many of the statements interviewees made about their BLUEprint family closely resembled real-life family dynamics, as mentioned by Hudson. "The family dynamic is

interesting because it literally tells you, these are 15-20 people you are going to get close with. You don't really have a choice, kind of like a real family.” Most members found the family structure to be extremely helpful not only in forming immediate connections, but establishing a sense of lineage across multiple years of BLUEprint involvement.

### *Intra-organizational Leadership Opportunities*

BLUEprint provides members with an opportunity to hold leadership positions on what they refer to as the Planning Committee or ‘PC’, typically known as an executive board or e-board in other campus groups. Entering a leadership position as early as the start of one’s sophomore year can be difficult to achieve on a campus as large and complex as Penn State’s.

Having extensive opportunities for leadership within the organization exists not only through the PC, but also the position of family leader. Both of these opportunities encourage student commitment and connection to the org, while also providing opportunities for initiative and leadership. Adanna talks about the confidence boost and pride she gained from staff members entrusting her with large pieces of programming.

With [my leadership position], I was able to plan a day of service, completely on my own. That was pretty big for me, considering I was given full reigns on planning a service project without supervision from Kristen or our GAs. That was pretty cool to see them have so much faith and trust in me.

### *Extensive Participation and Active Membership Requirements*

While the organization’s intensive programming calendar and active participation requirements work for most students, there was some acknowledgement that BLUEprint does ask a lot of members, particularly those in leadership positions, and fulfilling that expectation can be a bit overwhelming and hard to find space away from. For most members, having

BLUEprint touch almost every part of their lives was rewarding and comforting, but for others, they expressed how the org's prominent presence can be overwhelming.

The person taking my position next year asked how much time I devote to BLUEprint. I couldn't even tell you that. I feel like I'm always doing BLUEprint in some capacity. It's like a full-time job between the logistics of my mentee coordinator role, mentee meetings, PC meetings, meeting with my mentee.

Adanna, above, speaks on the demands placed on her by the organization's programming and the positions she holds.

The extensive membership requirements have grown over time as the organization's membership expanded, which is to be expected. These requirements not only ensure that the learning outcomes are being fulfilled by each student, but they also allow program administrators to track members' active participation, helping them to maintain student cohorts that are truly engaged and plan for how many new students to admit, as the number of applications has grown in recent years.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

Clearly, students who join the program upon arriving on campus have an easier transition into the academic structure of the university, into overall campus life, and into a social network. Students noted frequently how, particularly in times of doubt or distress, the program eased their transition into college life and kept them on campus, showing that BLUEprint is accomplishing its central mission.

There is strong sense of home, family, and community support permeating all aspects of the group. Time and time again, mentors noted how they felt comfortable and at home, and knew they had people on their side to consult in times of need and to celebrate with in times of success and joy. This sense of belonging creates a high-level of respect for and ownership of being a member of the organization and seems to be a key incentivizing factor for not only maintaining active status, but taking active leadership roles and becoming ever more committed to the program and its mission.

It is not atypical for student organizations to hold public events and invite other members of the university community to engage with their membership and experience who they are and what they do as a group. BLUEprint could easily keep its doors closed to students outside of the organization's participating membership. Having dedicated efforts to involve the broader university community and engage new individuals with the content and broader efforts of the group sends a strong signal of the value placed on being a part of the larger Penn State community and how the group operates in service, both internally and externally. The ideas of

belonging and open doors became interesting once juxtaposed with interview comments discussing the openness of the organization to all Penn Staters, not just students of color.

Identity, whether racial, ethnic, cultural, regional, religious, or otherwise, exists as a very salient part of the lives of BLUEprint members. Part of this arises from it being a frequent topic of conversation, educational sessions, and leadership/individual development programs. For almost every student interviewed, they noted that they were either more in-tune with their own identity, had interacted with identities/backgrounds that they had not prior to college, or that they had found a home within BLUEprint, for themselves and their identity. As the program continues on, I would hope that the staff and student leaders continue to assess how identity plays an active, intentional, and unintentional role across the entirety of the program and its membership.

In numerous cases, interviewees brought up 'who' BLUEprint serves on campus. In all cases, this topic of discussion came up solely through the interviewee with no director prompt from the interviewer or within the interview protocol. Members mentioned that while BLUEprint serves primarily students of color, the organization is and always has been open to all students, racial/ethnic background aside. They did note that this has become a new effort within the organization to ensure that they are welcoming and inclusive to prospective members, while also staying true to their mission of easing the campus transition. I hope that the staff watches the pulse of this idea as it continues to move through and take root in the organization.

This statement of BLUEprint being open to all people, but primarily serving students of color exemplifies how student affairs programs and higher education professionals alike continue to grapple with providing particular student sub-populations with spaces that align to and serve their identity, background, and student service needs, while also keeping the door to offices,



resources, and personnel as open as possible. SA professionals will continue to grapple with how to advocate for the needs of the students that they serve.

While this research study has provided depth and perspective for program administrators to evaluate the core function of this peer mentoring program, this study did not find significant results on self-authorship development, although a wide variety of student growth experiences undoubtedly occur through membership. Other researchers looking at the development of identity, self-authorship, or other student development theories should attempt to design studies to be more longitudinal, as to capture a more complete timeline of change or development.

Future research should examine mentoring programs with different contexts and characteristics, such as on a campus that is smaller, private, or more urban/suburban in location. Studies looking at peer mentoring programs not housed in a cultural center, structured differently, or targeted to a different student sub-population or with different learning outcome goals will provide useful insight into the broader context of peer mentoring within higher education.

I will be continuing to collect data on the program in the next few months and submitting another version of this study for my master's program thesis requirement. Moving forward into that next project, I am looking to interview more members, with a focus on mentees. In addition to further student interviews, I want to interview the staff members who work with the program to talk specifically about the planning of educational components and the overall structure of the program. Talking with staff about their visions for the program, specific organizational and educational goals, and their personal perspective on how the group is operating could be useful perspective to compare against student perspectives. I would be curious to see what matches and does not match within those two data sets.

I will also attend any public group events happening during the remainder of this semester and integrating data from semester program assessments performed by the office. The data in these assessments comes from student surveys conducted at the close of each academic year and might be useful to cross reference what the program already knows and assesses with what has been found in my research.

## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

#### *Questions asked to all respondents*

1. What is your name, year at the university, and program of study?
2. How long have you been a part of BLUEprint?
  - a. For Mentees: Do you want to become a mentor down the road?
  - b. For Mentors: What made you want to become a mentor?
3. How did you first find out about the program?
4. What made you want to get involved?
5. Tell me about a time you learned something about *yourself*, as a result of being a BP member?
6. What have you learned about *others* as a result of being in BP?
7. What are your strengths and how have you used them as a mentor/mentee?

#### *Respondents asked from the following, but not all questions were posed to every interviewee*

1. What were your expectations when you joined BLUEprint?
  - a. How much have your experiences matched those expectations so far?
2. What challenges have you faced this academic year where you were unsure of what was right in those situations?
  - a. Who are your support systems in those times?
  - b. Give me a percentage out of 100 indicating the proportion BLUEprint is of your overall support system.
3. Please give an example of how being in BP can assist you in communicating effectively with diverse individuals.
4. College is often a time of exposure to multiple and new perspectives—encountering people who grew up differently than you, hold different beliefs than you, encountering new ideas in classes, going through experiential learning. Have you encountered new perspectives like these?
  - a. How did that/those experience(s) affect the way you see things?
5. Tell me the best part about being a member of BLUEprint.
6. Tell me the best part about being a Penn Stater.
7. Give me two BLUEprint moments, high and low.
8. Tell me about your mentor.
9. What are your big takeaways from the experiences that you've had in BP?
10. Do you have anything else that you'd like to share?

## Appendix B

### Researcher Identity Memo

3/2/17

In qualitative research, a self-reflective memo exploring the principal investigator's identity in relation to the research subject(s) is important for two reasons. First, it allows the researcher to take a moment to critically reflect upon and begin to understand how they will likely influence the research, as well as providing them with an opportunity to bring themselves back to the core motivation behind initially choosing this particular research project. Second, it provides a reader of the project an understanding of the researcher's juxtaposition to the subject(s) being studied.

As a result of my experience working as a paraprofessional on campus at Penn State University Park, both as a resident assistant for three years and as a program coordinator in the LGBTQA Student Resource Center, I interacted with and assisted students for whom identity was very salient in their life and was linked to one or many difficult moments during their college career. When beginning to think about what a thesis project would look like, I knew I wanted to take the opportunity to hear the stories and the journeys of these students, whether they be students of color, queer students, first-generation, etc. As my time at Penn State pushed forward, my involvement in student affairs grew and my knowledge of student development expanded. I found myself wanting to explore mentorship and its significance in the development of college students, particularly those who were underrepresented, either historically and/or on their campus.

Through my relationship with BLUEprint's staff coordinator, Kristen Wong (Assistant Director of the Paul Robeson Cultural Center at Penn State), I found a subject and a home for my research. Throughout my time at Penn State, I had friends who were a part of BLUEprint and my relationship with Kristen spanned my five years in varying capacities. BLUEprint provided an opportunity to explore a comprehensive peer mentoring program and to understand its influence and impact on the experience of students of color at a PWI campus/university. After talking with Kristen about what she hoped a thesis

project on the program would reveal and matching that with my hopes to explore self-authorship and discover best practices, BLUEprint became my thesis.

One of the greatest challenges I faced in exploring and understanding this identity-based mentoring group came from exactly that...my own identity. As a qualitative researcher, it is necessary to acknowledge my identity as a white researcher studying a group of primarily students of color. I counter any challenge to that notion with two important points.

First, I have spent a lot of time in the PRCC over my five years and I know a handful of the long-time BLUEprint members. This allowed me to more easily gain validation and trust from the members, a lot of which has nothing to do with race, but is simply due to the fact that my knowing members sends a signal to others in the group, telling them that I'm not a complete outsider. Also, my relationship with Kristen was a great help in assuring all of the members of BLUEprint that I was there in a research capacity solely to finish my thesis and help give Kristen some interesting and useful information about the program that she's worked so hard to build.

Second, my identity as a queer male gives me irreplaceable and invaluable perspective on what it is like to be a member of a campus minority group. As someone who has endured a number of positive and negative experiences at Penn State, due to my sexual orientation, there is a certain lens through which you view the world after these instances. My experience with my own identity, as well as my work as a peer educator on LGBTQ+ issues on campus, has given me the ability to understand and relate well to others of all backgrounds and identities.

At the same time, while these identities of myself and the members of BLUEprint are without a doubt core to the establishment of the program itself and a component of my research project and research experience, identity is not the main purpose of this study. At the end of the day, I am hoping to learn about how BLUEprint membership has contributed to these students' college experiences and to see if participation in the mentoring program contributes to development of self-authorship within the mentors and mentees. Identity, racial/ethnic and otherwise, are important components of why students have joined the program, the program's mission, and my own gravitation toward the program as a subject of study, but it is not the main purpose of the study, which is to understand the program as a case for quality peer mentorship.

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**Resident Assistant**

*Penn State University, Office of Residence Life*

**August 2013 – May 2016**

*University Park, PA*

- Expanded living-learning opportunities for first-year, undeclared students by providing peer assistance through policy enforcement and program management.

**Summer Program Coordinator**

*Brown University, School of Professional Studies*

**June 2015 – August 2015**

*Providence, RI*

- Guided 300 high school students through seminars to explore leadership development and complete college preparatory work.
- Co-instructed courses in global engagement and public policy.

**Program Coordinator**

*Penn State University, LGBTQA Student Resource Center*

**August 2014 – May 2015**

*University Park, PA*

- Managed scheduling, coordination, outreach, and development of peer-education program, including SPSS assessment of impact & effectiveness, reaching 1500 campus participants in the academic year.

**MIP Intern**

*City of Philadelphia, Office of the Mayor*

**June 2014 – August 2014**

*Philadelphia, PA*

- Orchestrated 8-week outreach campaign for 'Free Summer Meals PA', a summer lunch program that reaches thousands of youth across Philadelphia.
- Served as assistant to Youth Commission executive director.

**Volunteer/Service**

Out for Undergrad (O4U): Campus Ambassador

Office of Student Orientation: Diversity & Inclusion Committee Member

Philadelphia Urban Seminar: Student Teacher

Youth Services Opportunities Project (YSOP): Urban Service Participant

**Awards/Scholarships**

Fred Fotis Scholarship (2014, 2015)

LGBTQA Alumni Interest Group Outstanding Student Award (2015)

Lois High Berstler Scholarship (2015)

Essence of Joy Alumni Singers Scholarship (2015, 2016)

2016 Sodexo NUFPP Graduate School Scholarship (2016)

J. Bonnie Newman Trustee Scholarship (2016)

**Professional Memberships**

Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA)

NASPA Undergraduate Fellow Program (NUFP)

National Residence Hall Honorary (NRHH)

**International Education**

London, UK Winter 2015 Theatre