

# Degrees of Success: Best Practices and Innovations for Mentoring Underrepresented College Students

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Washington DC



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# Agenda

- Brief introduction and background
- Mixed-methods longitudinal investigation of naturalistic mentoring relationships and help-seeking (Hagler)
- MentorPRO: Technology-enhanced mentoring intervention (Werntz, Jasman, & Rhodes)
- Connected Futures: Youth-initiated mentoring and social capital intervention (Schwartz & Raposa)
- Open forum: Questions and brainstorm for practice implications and next steps

# Underrepresented College Students' Experiences in Higher Education

10%

Low-income, first-generation college students graduate with Bachelor's degree in 6 years (Pell Institute, 2011)

60%

Low-income, first-generation college students who discontinue do so during or directly after their first year (Engle & Tinto, 2008)

<25%

Students who leave college without graduating do so for academic reasons (Kuh et al., 2006)



# Barriers for Marginalized/Underrepresented Students



Race- and class-based segregation, disproportionate school resources (Mickelson et al., 2008)



Underrepresentation of students/faculty of color (Ahmed & Boser, 2014)



Implicit and explicit discrimination (Hope et al., 2015)



Financial, household, and/or childcare responsibilities (Engle & Tinto, 2008)



Cultural capital & the “hidden curriculum” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Yee, 2016)



Negative beliefs about help-seeking (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Yee, 2016)

# The Role of Mentors



Institutional agents  
(Stanton-Salazar, 2011)

First-gen and other underrepresented students' mentoring relationships linked with:

- Better grades via reduced distress (Hurd et al., 2017)
- Greater social and academic integration (Crisp, 2010)
- Higher rates of persistence (Barnett, 2010)
- Stronger sense of belonging in higher education (Raposa & Hurd, 2021)

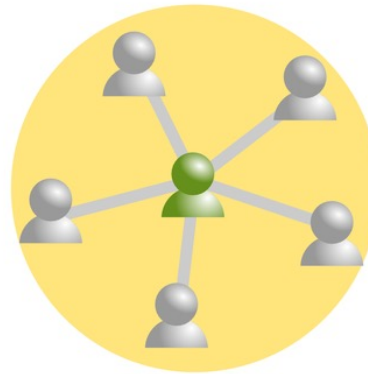
# Heterogeneity among Mentoring Relationships

- **Strong vs. Weak ties** (Hagler, 2018; Raposa et al., 2017)
- **Core vs. Capital mentors** (Gowdy et al., 2021, 2022)

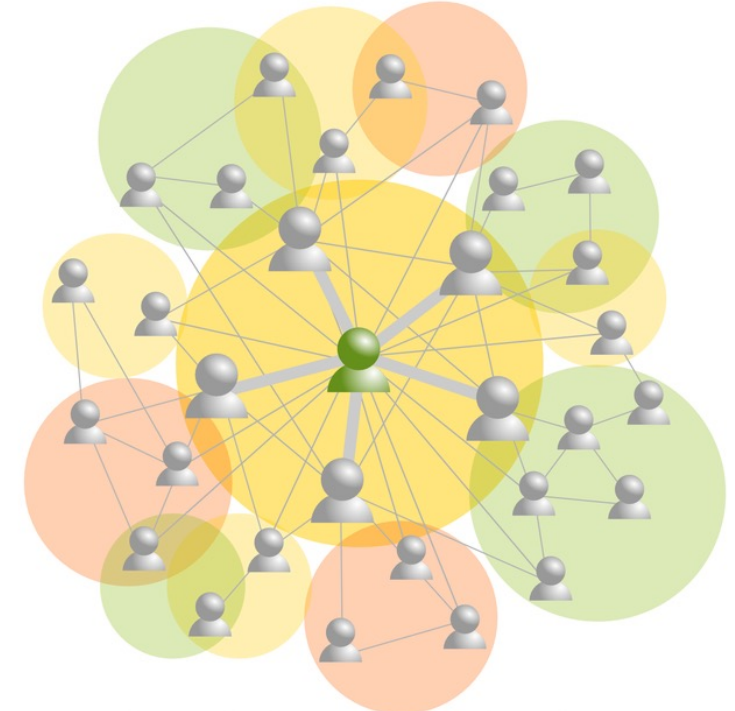
Weak-tie/capital mentors:

- Provide more informational & instrumental support
- Associated with better academic, vocational, & economic outcomes

## The Strength of Weak Ties



CONNECTIONS THROUGH STRONG TIES



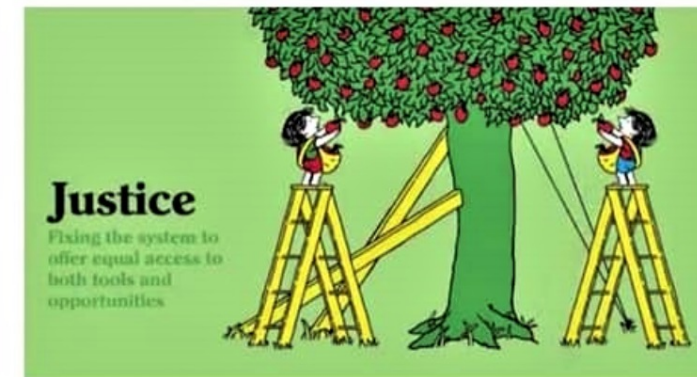
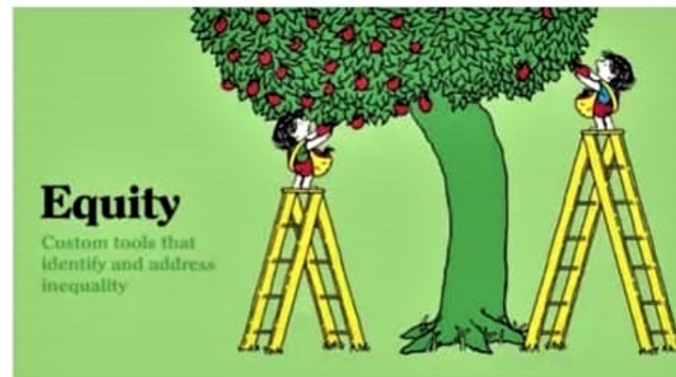
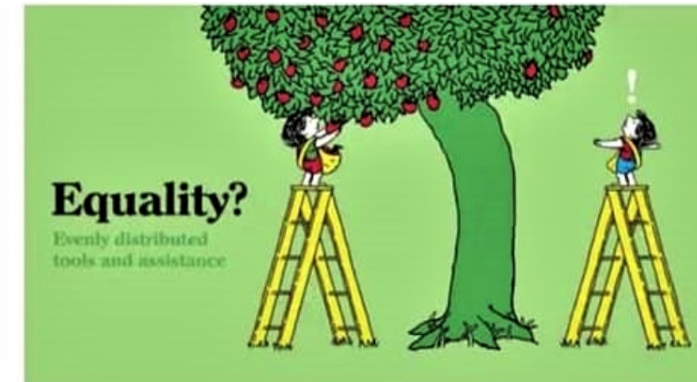
CONNECTIONS THROUGH WEAK TIES

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# Inequitable Access to Mentoring

- Marginalized youth have limited access to mentoring relationships, especially those with “weak-tie,” capital mentors (Erickson et al., 2009; Gowdy et al., 2021, 2022; Hagler & Poon, 2023; Raposa et al., 2017)
- Racial/ethnic minority and first-gen college students less likely to be mentored by faculty/staff (Raposa et al, 2020)



# Seeking Help and Mentorship During the Transition to College: A Mixed-Methods Investigation among First-Generation Students

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# Study Design and Measures

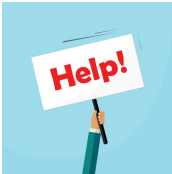
Baseline: Summer before/1<sup>st</sup> semester of 1<sup>st</sup> year  
July – October 2018



Demographics



College self-efficacy  
(Solberg et al., 1993)



Help-seeking beliefs  
(Fleming & Whalen, 1990)



Mentoring relationships  
and support

Follow-up: End of 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of 1<sup>st</sup> year  
April – June 2019



Psychological sense  
of school belonging  
(Goodenow, 1993)

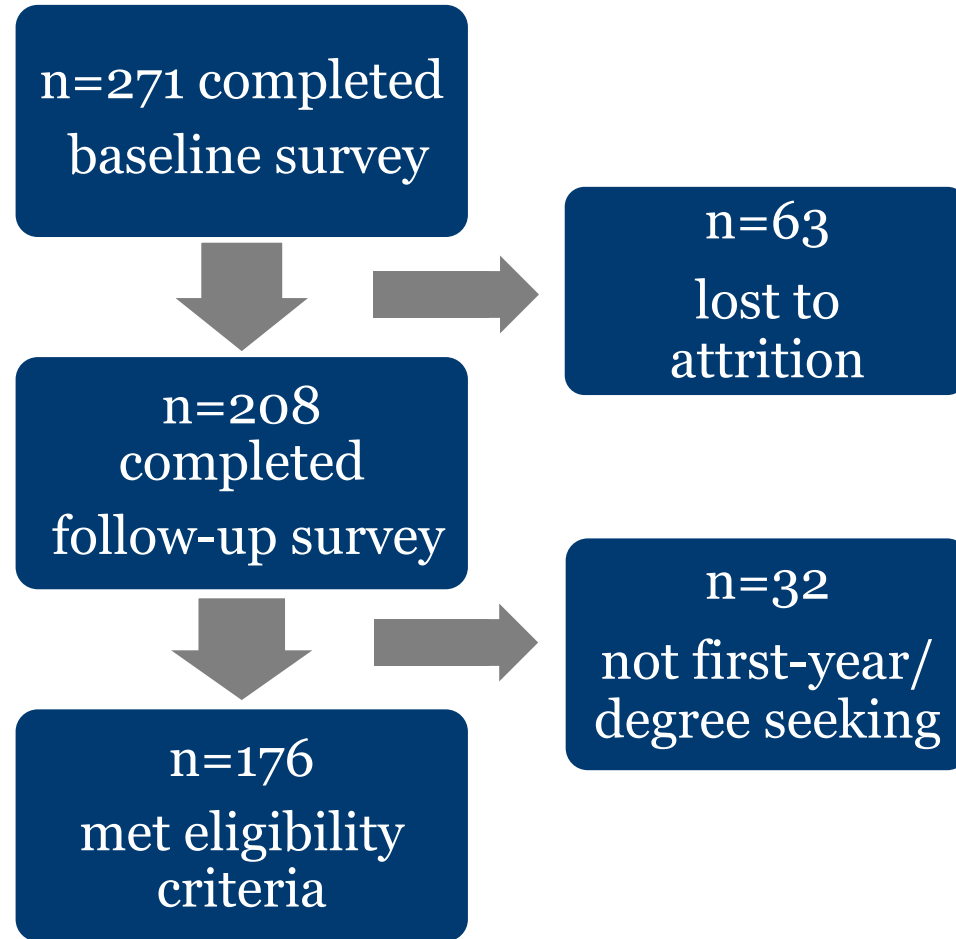


College self-efficacy  
(Solberg et al., 1993)



Mentoring relationships  
and support

# Participant Flow and Demographics



**Analytic sample (n=176)**

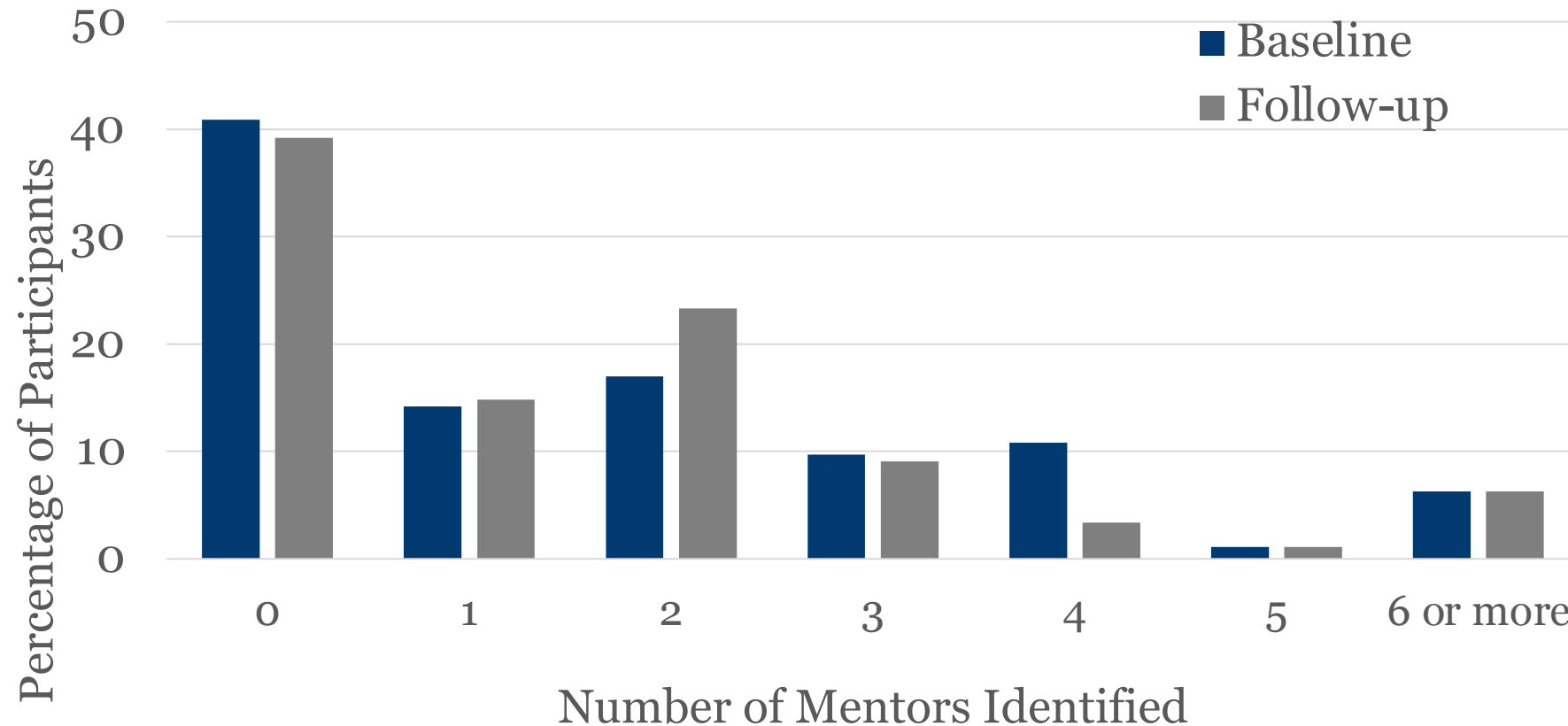
**Mean Age: 18.3 (0.80)**

**73.7% cis-female 0.7% transman  
0.7% cis-male 0.4% non-binary**

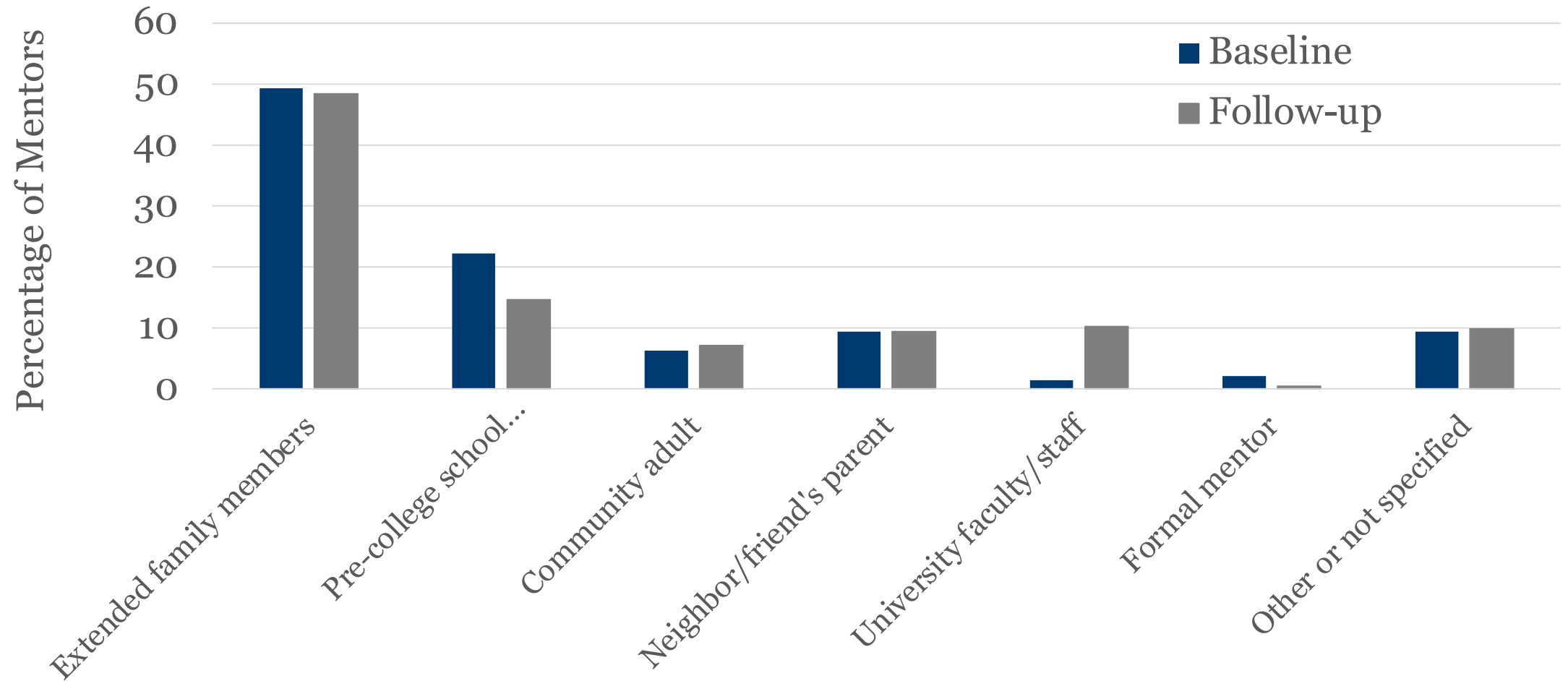
**33.7% White 28.0% Latinx  
22.9% Asian 20.0% Black  
3.4% MENA 1.1% Native  
1.1% Pac. Isl. 4.6% Other**

**74.8% 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> gen. immigrant  
54.8% English as first language**

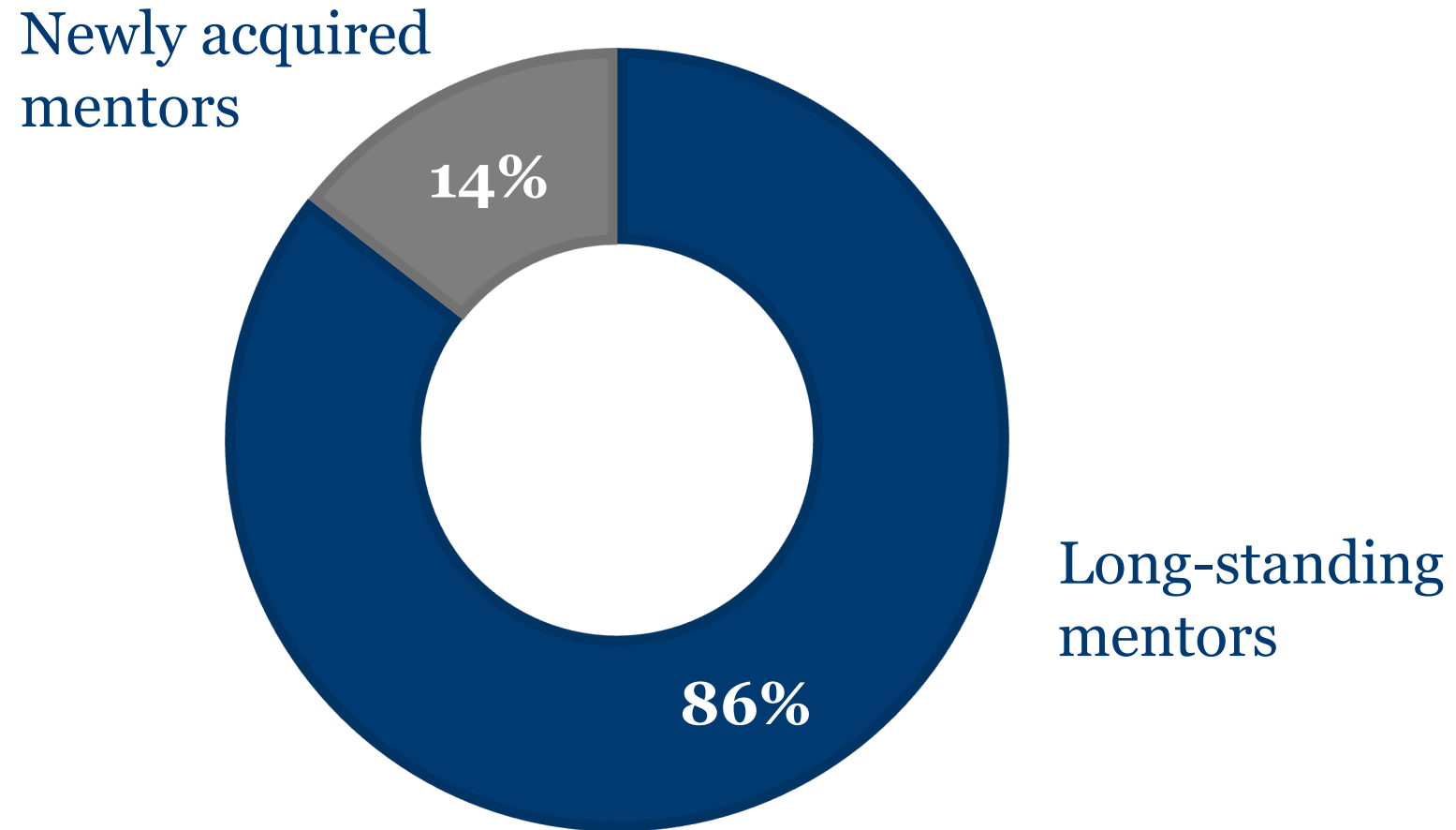
# Mentoring Network Size



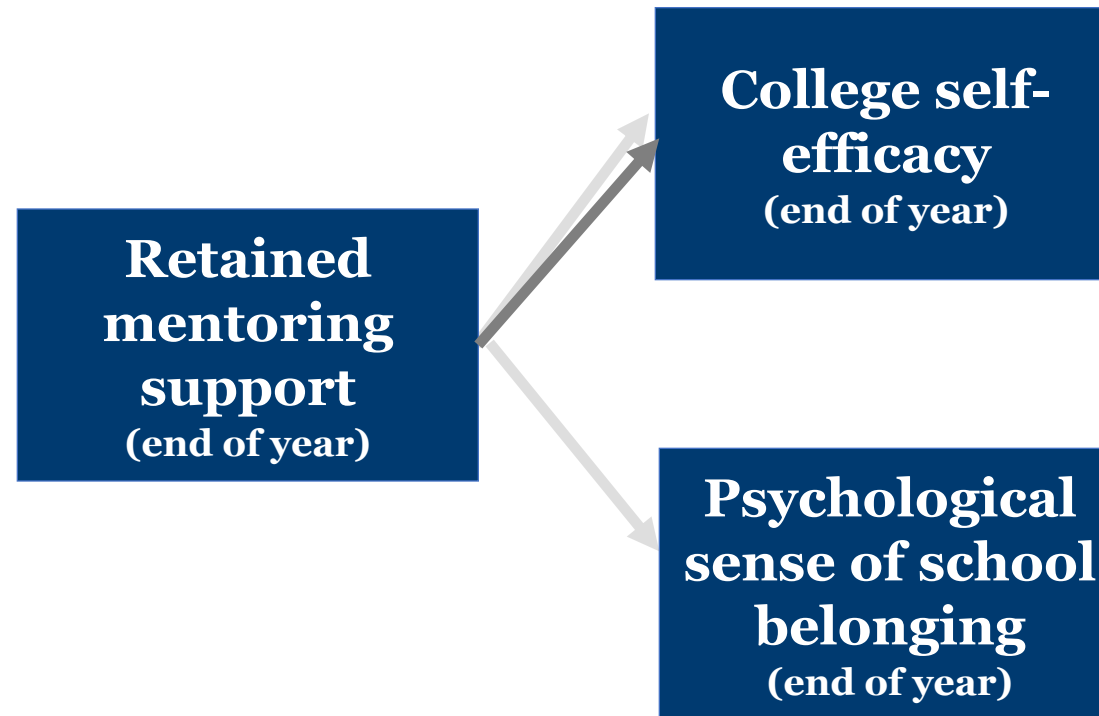
# Mentors' Social Roles



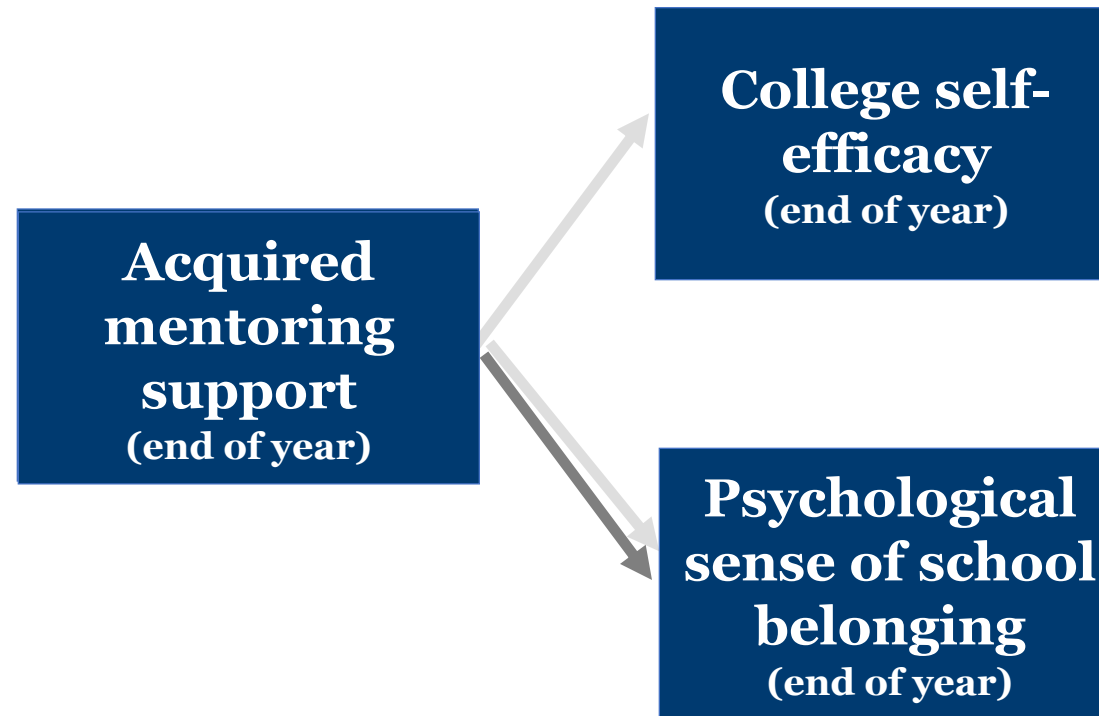
# Mentors at End of Year



# Mentoring Support and Help-seeking Beliefs

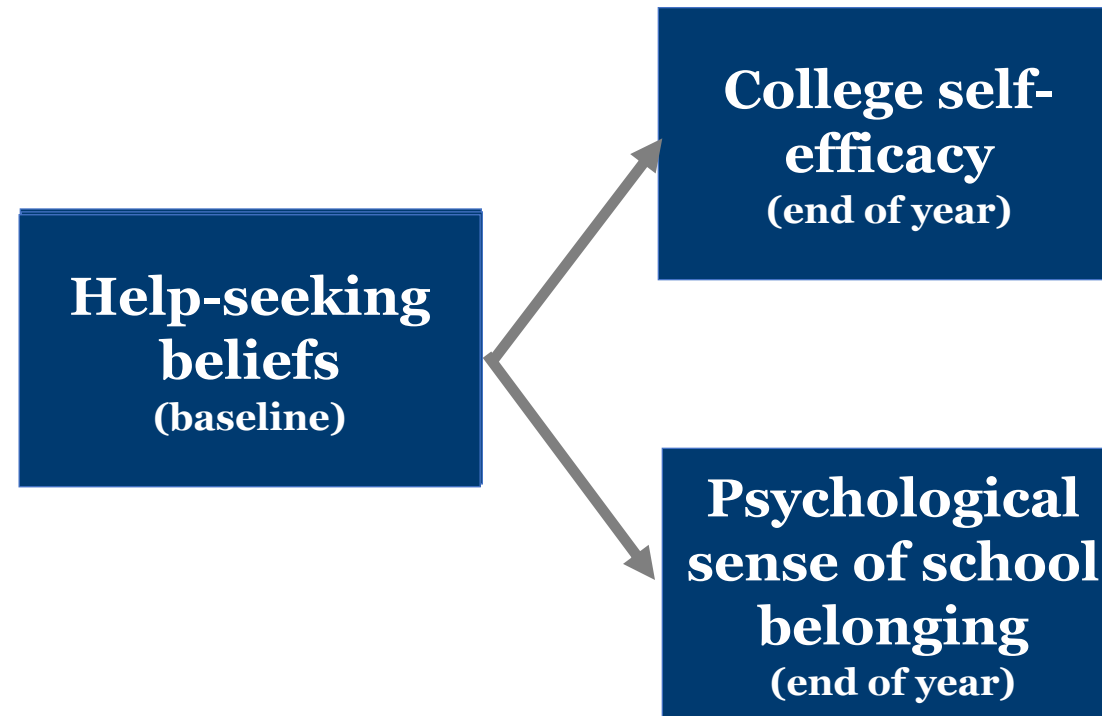


# Mentoring Support and Help-seeking Beliefs

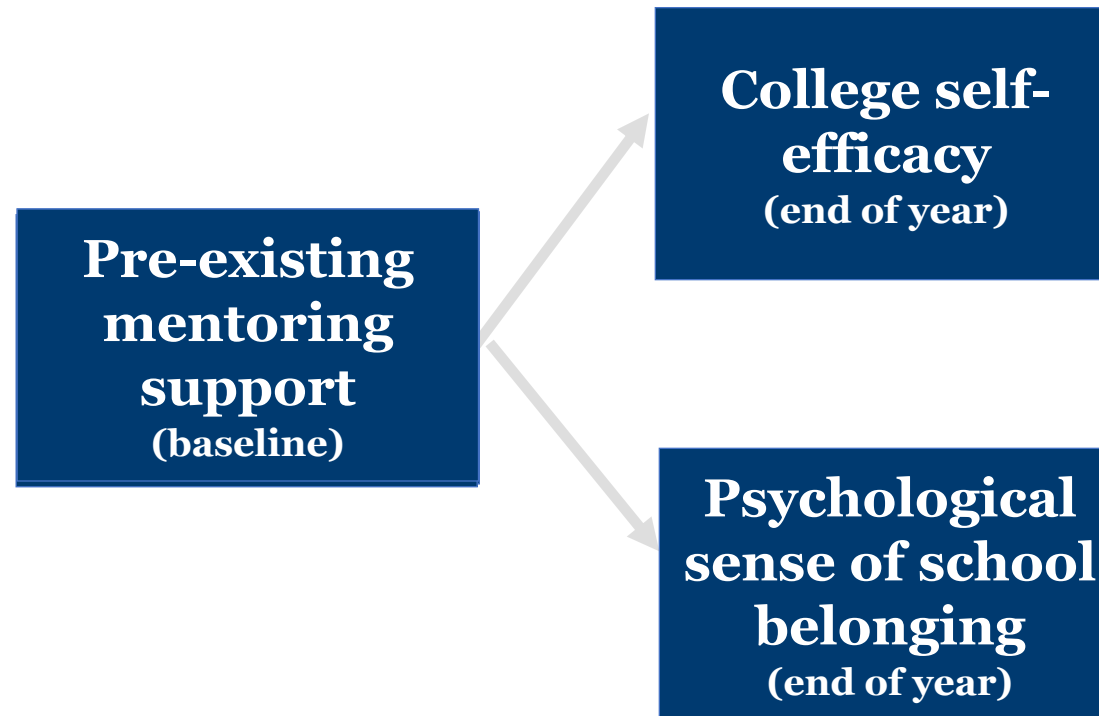




# Mentoring Support and Help-seeking Beliefs








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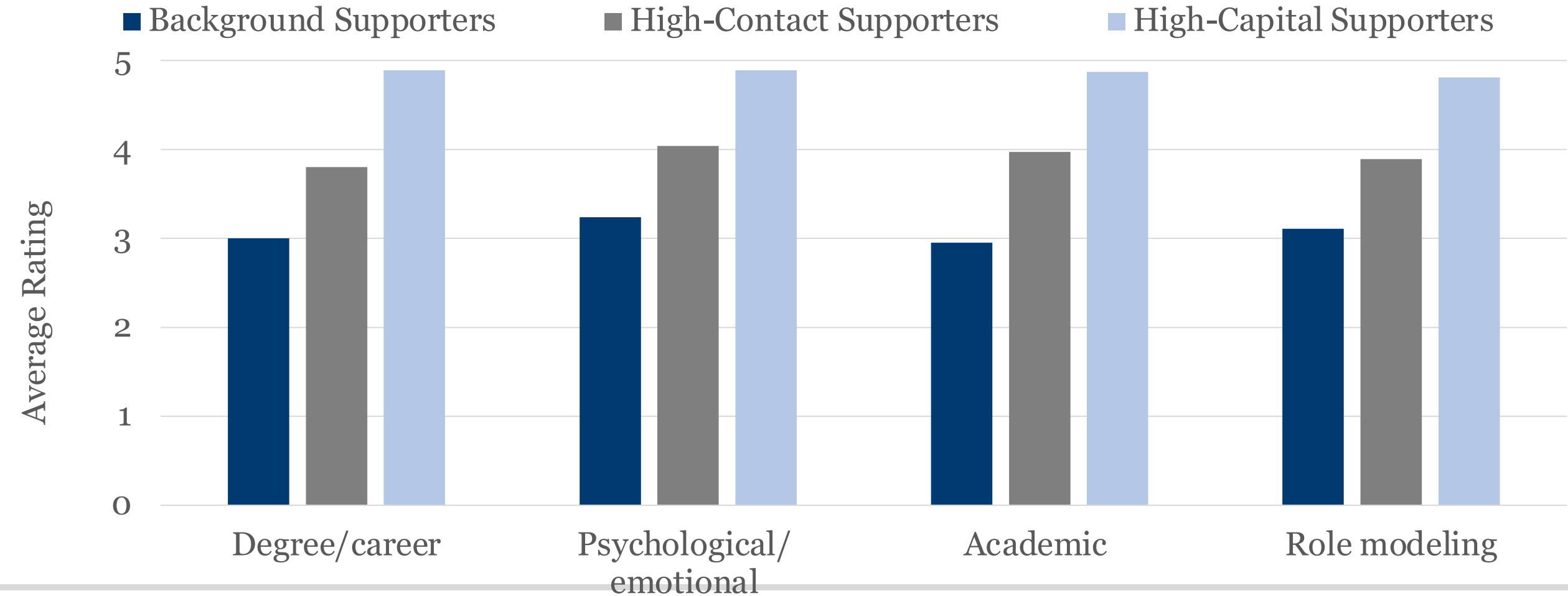
# Latent Profile Analysis

- Analytic method that enables researchers to examine underlying typologies/classifications
- All mentoring relationships (n=254) nominated by participants (n=100) at end of year
- Profile indicators:
  - Interpersonal: Time known, perceived closeness, frequency of contact
  - Support: Psychological/emotional, academic, career/degree, role modeling
  - Mentors' educational attainment

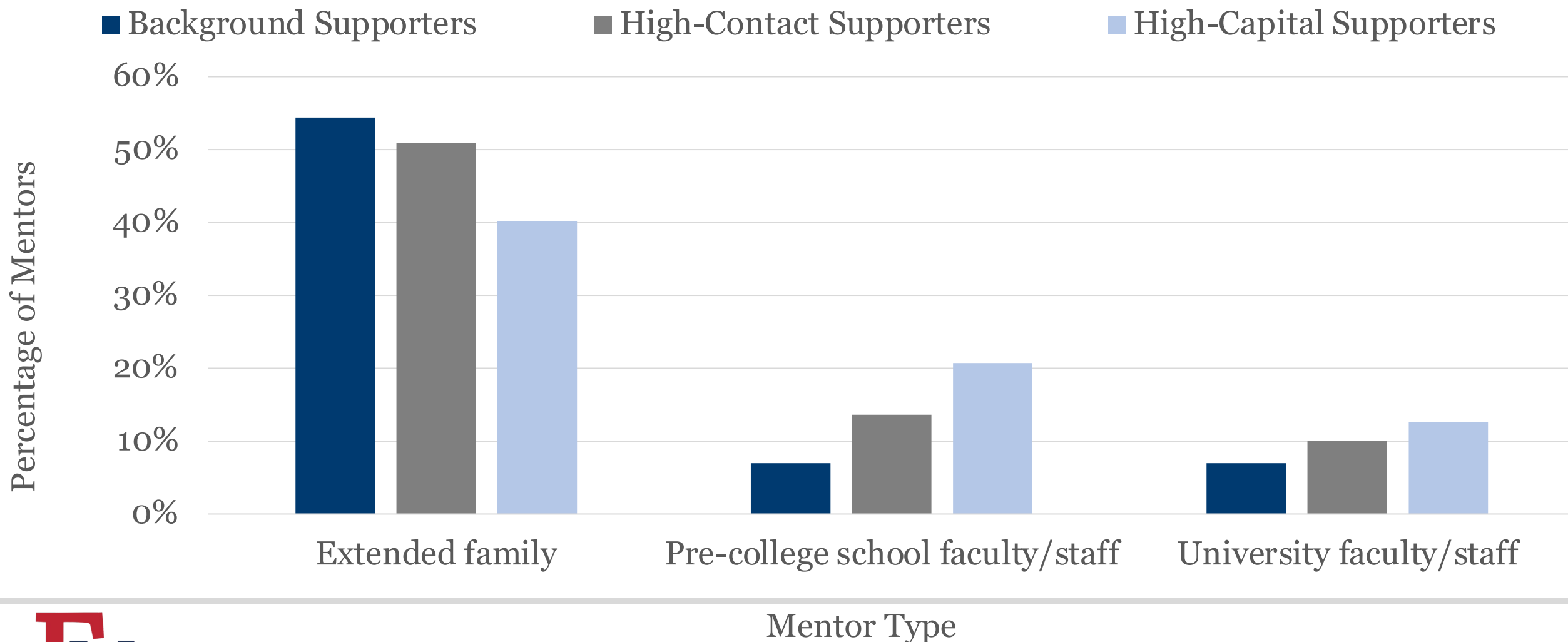
# Relationship and Mentor Characteristics

	Background Supporters (n=57)	High-Contact Supporters (n=110)	High-Capital Supporters (n=87)
	“Somewhat” to “Quite close” (3.68/5)	“Quite” close” (4.27/5)	“Quite” to “Extremely close” (4.5/5)
	Known over 10 years	Known 6-10 years	Known less than 6 years
	In-person contact once per month	In-person contact once per month	In-person contact once per month
	Remote contact once per month	Remote contact at least 3 times per month	Remote contact once per month
	No college degree	Associate’s or vocational degree	Bachelor’s degree

# Domains of Support



# Mentors' Social Roles



# Qualitative Interviews

- n=25 of participants participated in qualitative interviews at end of the year
- Interviews ~45 min, asking about general experience applying, navigating the first year, attitudes toward help-seeking, mentoring relationships
- Reflective thematic analysis with research question: **What factors impact students' decisions and behavior around help-seeking (if, when, and from whom?)**





# Theme: There's No Such Thing as Free Help

Subtheme: Time as a precious resource.

“I would say not having time....not really finding time to schedule with someone...I just wanted to get me work done....and I already have enough on my plate. I don't have time to do this extra thing.”

Subtheme: Shame in asking?

“I'm a very private person...I don't like to show my worst parts, like my worst moments, or any struggle that I have. So if I'm struggling, I'm going to do it by myself.”

# Theme: “I’m just used to it”: Figuring things out alone

“For the most part, I’m pretty okay doing things on my own...just because I had to do so many things on my own - that I’m just used to it. So, I’m just like – my natural reaction to things – ‘Oh! I’ll just do it.’”

“I really like being self-sufficient... Asking for help isn’t bad or anything - although I don’t do it a lot. It’s just like...if I can be self-sufficient,...without any help, then, like, it will make me ...feel better.”

# Theme: “Physical solutions” for “physical problems”

Subtheme: Asking when the need become clear      Subtheme: Finding needed resources

“My grades and the GPA and, um, how I feel if I don’t go for help. Like, would I forgive myself – if I did not – when I could have gotten this grade but did not ask for help.”

“I have this rule that if I cry actual real tears, I’ll go for help. But if I don’t cry,...then I’ll just figure it out myself.”

“Unlike my parents, [my Big Sister] did go to college, and she got her masters...so for my college essay, when I was applying to colleges – she read it...and gave me edits.”

# Theme: Opening the Door

Subtheme: Having a designated person/place

[My RA]... was helpful. She's right down the hall. So, that makes it easy. That's the kind of thing that she is supposed to help with, - this is someone who I can go to."

Subtheme: An extra nudge

"[My peer mentor] would check in, like 'Oh, do you have any problems?' ....For me,...it's hard for me to sometimes go out and seek, like, the help. But, if someone is like 'Hey! Is there anything that you are having trouble with?' it makes it easier"

# Theme: Creating a Holding Space

Subtheme: “It seemed like [they] really cared”

Subtheme: Someone who “gets it”

“I wrote an essay about the American Dream, talking about my personal situation, and [my professor] reached out to me, like ‘I can help you show you where to go for financial aid....and grants for low-income students.’”

“I’d rather go to someone I know that I know wouldn’t judge me with the questions I’m asking...if they’re experiencing the same thing as me.”

# Promoting Help-seeking and Mentorship



## Teaching students to fish

- Difference education (Nicole Stephens)
- Help-seeking and networking interventions (Sarah Schwartz, Liz Raposa)
  - Connected Futures
- Reframing help-seeking as autonomy-building

# Promoting Help-seeking and Mentorship



“Stocking the Pond” (creating mentor-rich environments)

- Dedicated tutoring and advising centers (inclusive hours, virtual options)
- Faculty incentives – tenure, course releases?
- Faculty training on evidence-based mentoring
- Engaging families – extended orientation, support groups (virtual, multilingual)



# Promoting Help-seeking and Mentorship



## Providing “fish finders”

- One-stop offices
- Technology-facilitated interventions (MentorPRO)
- “Point persons” – advisors, peer mentors, case managers

# Thank you!



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Renesha Johnson  
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Johnathan Boags

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# Papers

- Hagler, M. (2023). Mentoring first-generation college students: Examining distinct relationship profiles based on interpersonal characteristics, support provision, and educational capital. *Journal Community Psychology*, 48(8), 3328-3347.  
DOI: 10.1002/jcop.23003
- Hagler, M., Christensen, K., & Rhodes, J. (2024). A longitudinal investigation of first-generation college students' mentoring relationships during their transition to higher education. *Journal of College Student Retention: Theory, Research & Practice*, 25(4), 791-819. DOI: 10.1177/15210251211022741
- Hagler, M., Johnson, R., Snipe, L., & Boags, J. (online first). A qualitative thematic analysis of first-generation college students' help-seeking attitudes and behaviors during their first year. *Journal of College Student Retention: Theory, Research & Practice*.  
DOI: 10.1177/15210251231198006

# Questions for Presenters + Think and Share

- Unanswered questions: What else do we need to know/figure out to support underrepresented college students and reduce educational inequities?
- What are some your key take-homes and how can you use them in your work with youth?
- Is there anything we've suggested that wouldn't work or translate well to your particular setting/context? Why?