Peers Mentoring the Future:

An Assessment of the Kelley FUTURES Program

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This study reviews the satisfaction and the confidence in persisting of underrepresented students in a peer mentoring program in the Indiana University Kelley School of Business. The research team reached out to the Kelley Office of Diversity Initiatives to get in contact with mentees in the office’s peer mentoring program known as the Fostering Underrepresented Talent Using Resources, Educators, and Scholars program, or the Kelley FUTURES Program. Utilizing Museus’ Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model, current literature on the effectiveness of mentorship, and interviews with the participants, the research team evaluated how the FUTURES Program was being utilized by students and their perceived benefits from their participation. This information helped the research team give recommendations on how the program can be improved so that it can more effectively support the underrepresented students in the program.

Keywords: mentorship, underrepresented students, persistence

Indiana University-Bloomington is acknowledged for housing more than 550 academic programs and aims to provide the platform for students to fulfill their promises and become the best version of themselves (Indiana University, 2018a). Among its programs include the Kelley School of Business, one of the more well-known programs to the student body. Known for its academic rigor, Kelley’s programs pride themselves on the development of strong business acumen and marketable career placement for graduates, resulting in its place as one of the most highly sought-after degree paths for Indiana University students. Carried with these outcomes is an inquiry into the experiences of its students: particularly those of underrepresented minority status in a predominantly white environment\(^1\). The Kelley School of Business defines underrepresented minority students as those who identify as African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Native American, Pacific Islander & Native Hawaiian, or holding two or more races (Diversity Initiatives, 2018). Reported for Fall 2018, the underrepresented minority student representations comprise just over 15% of the total undergraduate population of the Bloomington campus (Indiana University, 2018b). This percentage amounts to 11% specifically for the Kelley School of Business (Class Profiles, 2018). This prompts the authors to inquire what steps the Kelley School of Business is carrying out to make meaning for these students and their experiences as a minoritized student population.

One measure in place to assist with diversity-related initiatives for the business program is the Kelley Office of Diversity Initiatives (KODI). KODI strives to

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\(^1\) We defined a predominantly white environment or institution as one in which White is the racial majority of those within the context.
“provide programs and a community for students to come together and feel supported, welcomed, and affirmed” (Diversity Initiatives, 2018). The Kelley Fostering Underrepresenting Talent Using Resources Educators & Scholars (FUTURES) program is among several initiatives in place to achieve KODI’s mission. The newly re-branded FUTURES program was reshaped to better capture the engagement of underrepresented minority students through the entirety of the academic year. Its target is to instill mentorship as a cultural phenomenon manifested by undergraduate juniors, seniors, and graduate students for first-year business students seeking guidance and support. The program prides itself on participant engagement in networking fairs, professional development workshops, and peer mentorship opportunities for pre-business and directly admitted first-year students. (Diversity Initiatives, 2018). The purpose of this research study is to assess the satisfaction of past participants in Kelley FUTURES, as well as their confidence to persist through the Kelley School of Business from their participation in the program. An analysis on the value participants gain from Kelley FUTURES was used to evaluate whether the intended outcomes of the program match those that mentees expected to learn from their experience. Moreover, we measured the attainment of these outcomes through assessment of how Kelley FUTURES supports mentees through facets of mentorship and other professional development opportunities that are tailored to fulfill professional and personal goals.

The value this research holds is to inform KODI on how to align Kelley FUTURES to complement campus-wide practices geared toward underrepresented minority students. The implications formed from this research offer considerations for the role Kelley FUTURES holds with this student population. Additionally, this study demonstrates to Kelley faculty and staff the importance of creating spaces for underrepresented students to have their identities validated, as that is posed as a challenge for these students within the Kelley School of Business. Within the predominantly white environment of the Kelley School of Business, Kelley FUTURES contributes to the development of strong relationships among the underrepresented minority community. It does this by supporting the mission of collaboration and provides opportunities for students to collectively come together to disrupt the dominant narrative of the Kelley student experience.

**Literature Review**

Since the Kelley FUTURES program focuses on the peer mentorship of underrepresented students, we felt it was important to look at literature that highlighted the importance of mentoring and, more specifically, the mentoring of underrepresented college students. According to the literature, almost 40 percent of all college students who enter a postsecondary institution do not complete a bachelor’s degree within six years of being at an institution (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). Low rates of degree attainment are common for college students in general, but even more so for students of color (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Many students of color have trouble finding holistic support on college campuses that can help lead to their success (Museus, 2014). With this review, we gained insight into the characteristics of what factors make a strong mentoring relationship for underrepresented students.

**Importance of Mentorship**
Mentorship can be one of the most valuable ways in which a pair of individuals grow in their personal and professional lives. In a mentoring relationship, the mentee primarily receives objective and subjective career and emotional benefits (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). There are several characteristics that can describe what a mentoring relationship looks like. First, mentoring must always involve and be centered on the dynamic relationship between two people that is mutually beneficial (Gentry, 2015; Kram, 1985). Additionally, the relationship must involve an increase in knowledge for both parties (Gentry, 2015; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). Finally, the mentoring process is one where the mentor provides emotional, personal, and career related support to the mentee (Gentry, 2015; Kram 1985). The benefits of this type of relationship have the potential to make a significant impact on the experiences of college students while they are enrolled, and has the potential to influence future career goals. Since the Kelley FUTURES program focuses on preparing underrepresented students for their classes and eventual careers, we believe that the points identified above have helped us identify the characteristics present in the mentoring relationships we studied.

When looking at the effectiveness of a mentoring relationship, the most important result is the growth of the mentee. The relationship is especially successful if the mentee feels they have received not only career-related support, but also emotional and psychosocial support (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). When a person receives mentoring they can encounter both objective and subjective benefits that will support them in their personal life and career (Allen et al., 2004). Since the mentee is the most important person in the relationship, it is necessary that they can articulate the objective and subjective benefits they received. In creating interview questions designed to gain an understanding of the benefits our participants experienced, we were able to gain an understanding of how the students were interpreting the learning opportunities provided by FUTURES.

Since the Kelley FUTURES program is a structured peer mentoring program, we needed to define what that type of relationship meant. Peer mentoring is a type of mentorship where both individuals are at a similar level within their organization (Gentry, 2015). For the purposes of our research, we will consider peer mentoring to be a mentoring relationship between two Indiana University students, where the mentor is an upperclassman or graduate student and the mentee is a first-year student or upperclassmen, respectively. Peer mentoring between students can aid in the socialization process of new students when mentors share information with mentees that is based on personal experience (Bryant, 2005; Gentry, 2015; Kram; 1985). In peer mentoring, we usually see the absence of a hierarchy between the mentor and mentee which places the mentor in a position where they can more freely communicate about certain topics and provide support in a more effective manner (Gentry, 2015; Kram & Isabella, 1985). Peer mentoring provides first-year students with the ability to make connections and gain knowledge of spaces with which they may be unfamiliar, or that they might not know how to navigate.

**Mentoring Relationships for Underrepresented Students**

In addition to the benefits of mentorship programs and peer mentoring, significant scholarship is dedicated to the impact of mentorship for various underrepresented students. Redmond (1990) speaks to two different types of mentoring, natural and planned, that take place between underrepresented students and faculty.
Natural mentoring is when individuals grow to know and build a genuine connection with each other. For underrepresented students, this often takes shape by identifying individuals with whom they feel most comfortable. Often times, these natural mentors share culturally similar identities to the students seeking mentorship. Speaking on why mentees seek natural mentorship, Hurd, Tan, and Loeb (2016) stated, “given that underrepresented students’ natural mentors are likely to have personal experiences with adversity and marginalization, they may be better able to provide sympathy and advice regarding how to cope with discrimination and other marginalizing experiences” (p. 331-332).

Unfortunately, many underrepresented students at predominantly white institutions do not have access to natural mentorship in their academic departments because individuals who share their similar cultural identities do not make up the majority of people in those spaces (Redmond, 1990). For instance, Hurtado et al. (2011) stated that students who are culturally different from their predominantly white male faculty are less likely to enter into mentorship with their faculty than their white peers. To counter this, Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, and Muller (2011) proposed the intentional creation of mentoring programs that target underrepresented students and foster mentoring relationships that match those students with mentors of the same, or similar, races and or genders. Although much of this literature is in the context of faculty-student relationships, we can assess peer mentoring programs for underrepresented students through the lens of natural and planned mentoring. Given that Indiana University is a predominantly white institution, programs like Kelley FUTURES need to be intentional about creating culturally validating and culturally responsive educational environments in order to properly support their students.

**Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework guiding our assessment and research questions is the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model. The purpose of the CECE model is to serve as a foundation to ensure that diverse student populations at colleges and universities have the support they need to be successful while focusing on future research that can be done to continuously support these students (Museus, 2014). The model consists of nine indicators, each having a different focus on how to best support and ensure the success of diverse college students on their respective campuses. The nine indicators are cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement, collectivist cultural orientation, culturally validating environments, humanized educational environments, proactive philosophies, and availability of holistic support. The CECE indicators as theorized by Museus (2014) provide specific behaviors that support and validate diverse students’ perspectives, lived experiences, knowledge, and cultural backgrounds that institutions and educators can incorporate into their own practice. Furthermore, this model challenges other traditional perspectives on student success that did not take into account the experiences and needs of racially diverse students, such as Tinto’s Theory of College Student Success (Museus, 2014).

As one of the programs under KODI, the Kelley FUTURES program can be assessed through the lens of the CECE Model to explore how well it supports students through mentorship. In the past, the CECE Model has been used to assess the
cultural relevance and responsiveness of campus environments, where each of the nine CECE indicators falls into either of these two categories. By identifying CECE indicators present in the mentorship program, we will be assessing whether or not the Kelley FUTURES program creates a culturally relevant environment for its student population as well as how well the program responds to the needs of their students. As our theoretical framework, the CECE Model lays the groundwork for how we examine and collect data on Kelley FUTURES.

In line with other scholars like Yosso (2005) who challenge the deficit discourse surrounding communities of color, we are applying the CECE Model to reject deficit assumptions about diverse student populations. In our application of the CECE Model, we intentionally ask questions and collect data in a way that centers underrepresented student voices in the Kelley FUTURES Program. As Chicano feminist scholar Anzaldua says, “Because we are not allowed to enter discourse…it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow white men and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxi). Thus, our research and theoretical framework act as a call to action for institutions and educators to critically examine what meaningful support looks like for racially diverse students on college campuses. The CECE Model has been used to highlight the importance of creating inclusive environments on the institution. Similarly, in our assessment of the Kelley FUTURES program, we will be focusing on the actions of the institution and its role in promoting an environment of academic and holistic support for underrepresented students.

In conjunction with the CECE model’s intentions for higher education administrators to effectively support diverse student populations, the Assistant Director of Diversity Initiatives in KODI described the goals of the Kelley FUTURES program to the researchers. In summary, he stated, “Kelley FUTURES will create a community where underrepresented minority students, both those who are directly admitted and as well as pre-business freshmen, are supported, encouraged, and mentored by Kelley undergraduate upperclassmen and graduate students as they achieve academically in pursuit of a business career” (C. White, personal communication, September 21, 2018). Kelley FUTURES staff hope that the mentoring relationships and personal invitations to attend events, like speaking events, present opportunities for FUTURES participants to matriculate into Kelley, build self-confidence, learn respect and inclusion, expand support networks, and gain awareness of professional opportunities (C. White, personal communication, September 21, 2018). The CECE model posits similar goals such as creating a greater sense of belonging, positive academic dispositions, and persistence toward graduation as forms of support for minoritized students, allowing for this research to compare the aligned goals of both the CECE Model and Kelley FUTURES (Museus, 2014).

**Methodology**

The present assessment studied a socially constructed environment in order to understand how mentors and mentees in the Kelley FUTURES program experience their environment and its impacts on their perspective of what those populations lack in comparison to overrepresented populations.

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1 We defined deficit discourse as discourse that approaches underrepresented populations from a
experiences as underrepresented students in the Kelley School of Business (Strange & Banning, 2015). The CECE model is applied in analysis in order to understand the present environment of Kelley FUTURES in relation to its goals of success for the diverse student population involved in Kelley FUTURES (Museus, 2014).

Two research questions guide this research:

1. Are the intended outcomes of the Kelley FUTURES program matching the perceived outcomes of the participants and mentors?
2. How does the Kelley FUTURES program support its participants and mentors personally and professionally?

Participants and Recruitment

The population for this study is comprised of students affiliated with the Indiana University Kelley School of Business who are currently participating in or have completed the yearlong Kelley FUTURES program through the KODI as either a mentee or a mentor. While the mentees in the Kelley FUTURES program are the targeted population receiving support and encouragement from peers to increase persistence and matriculation (Kelley FUTURES, 2018; Museus, 2014), mentoring relationships are viewed as mutually beneficial. Additionally, “mentors co-learning with novices and using mentoring as a site for professional learning for themselves, constitute intertwined aspects of enacting a collaborative inquiry approach in mentoring” (Ginkel, Verloop, & Dennessen, 2013, p. 2). Encountering culturally engaging campus environments involves students and educators, which in this case are both mentors and mentees (Gentry, 2015; Museus, 2014). For these reasons, we chose to look at both mentees and mentors in our study as they are each the primary benefactors of the mentoring relationship.

In order to access the appropriate population, the researchers of this study built upon the relationship with stakeholders to create a collaborative partnership with the staff at KODI. In particular, one member of the research team is a Kelley School of Business graduate. This member's connections with Kelley staff were helpful in creating partnership, gaining access to potential participants, and providing general knowledge regarding Kelley and KODI. When establishing a relationship with KODI, access to the population on which the research was focused became possible through gaining email address of students who are currently participating in Kelley FUTURES, or have participated in Kelley FUTURES and completed the program as either a mentee and/or a mentor. In addition to sending out an email, recruitment occurred in the Kelley School of Business classrooms as one of our research team members had relationships with Kelley faculty members. A PowerPoint slide was created with information regarding our study that was used by Kelley faculty when sharing announcements at the beginning of class.

Finally, researchers on our team spent a few hours inside the Kelley School of Business talking to students as they walked by informing them of our study and asking if they wished to participate once they identified if they had been involved in Kelley FUTURES. We also included incentives in our recruitment process by advertising that those who participated in a focus group would receive free food and drink purchased through funding from KODI.

Through the recruitment efforts, the research sample consisted of four Kelley FUTURES mentee participants who showed up and got back to the research team to
schedule an interview. Of the four, all were current mentees in the program and their chosen pseudonyms along with other demographics were recorded. One student identified as male and three identified as female. There were two participants who self-identified as Hispanic/Latinx, one as African American, and one as Asian American. For more information on the participants, please refer to Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>FUTURES Mentor or Mentee</th>
<th>Kelley Admittance Status</th>
<th>Introduction to FUTURES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td>Standard admit</td>
<td>Mentor in residence hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Hispanic / Latinx</td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td>Standard admit</td>
<td>Kelley Prep Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Hispanic / Latinx</td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td>Standard admit</td>
<td>KODI email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td>Direct admit</td>
<td>Scholarship Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The demographic information was gathered before each interview using self-identifying questions. The participants “introduction to FUTURES” was determined in each interview through the question “How did you hear about the Kelley FUTURES program?” (see Appendix B).
Assessment Design

As Kelley FUTURES is a newly rebranded program designed for underrepresented minority students, it is important to gather information and attempt to understand the program from the participant’s perspective (Merriam, 2002). In order to aim our research toward discovering the espoused versus enacted goals, as well as the support the Kelley FUTURES program provides, we sought to hold focus groups as well as interviews to gather data. We aimed to gain an understanding of Kelley FUTURES through the lens of student narratives, taking into account the nuances between student experiences, rather than relying on numerical indicators of the program’s success. Not only would focus groups provide an audience for the participants that “encourages a greater variety of communication” and mutual support in expressed feelings, but focus groups and interviews could also facilitate the expression of ideas and experiences that might be underdeveloped in other methods of data collection (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 116).

This study focused on depth rather than breadth, considering the smaller sample size and time constraints, which allowed the research team to examine more experiences from this population through advertising and conducting focus groups and individual interviews (Schuh, Biddix, Dean, & Kinzie, 2016). Due to time constraints and research availability, six focus groups total were advertised for no longer than 90 minutes and each focus group had a maximum of five open participant spots. Due to conflicts in participant schedules, none of the participants were able to meet during the advertised times or at the same time, which lead the researcher design to only include interviews and not focus groups. For the participants who signed up for a focus group and attended when they signed up, the researchers still went ahead and completed the interview with them at that time. For the participants who either did not show up to their interview or contacted the research team to reschedule, the research team communicated back to schedule the 30-minute interviews with them based on researcher and participant availability.

Even though focus groups did not occur, the interview design still allowed for the researchers to engage in exploratory questions for this program to discover what emerged from the participants. These questions were created to gather general data about experiences from the participants. In a semi-structured interview setting, we hoped participants would expand our understanding of the program from their perspectives, as well as explore possible responses we may not have considered (Suskie, 2009).

Data Collection

In this study, the researchers interviewed four current mentees of the Kelley FUTURES program to understand the effectiveness of the mentoring program. By asking them questions about their experiences in the program, we were able to gain an understanding of the benefits students gained through their participation in the Kelley FUTURES programs and the relationships with their mentors. The researchers drew conclusions, implications, and recommendations for
practice for the stakeholders within KODI based on a predetermined set of questions for mentors and mentees (Appendix B). The interview questions were formed based on the indicators presented in the CECE Model as well as using the intended outcomes of the FUTURES program (Museus, 2014). While the questions do not use the exact language present in the indicators, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed us to identify indicators without guiding the participants to identify with one or more indicators.

The data from these questions were collected from two-on-one interviews consisting of two interviewers and one participant, totaling four interviews. Interviews were conducted in a private space on the Indiana University campus between the interviewers and participants. Interviews were conducted to provide a larger understanding of the participants and their experiences from their direct perspectives (Schuh et al., 2016). The interviews were recorded electronically in order to revisit the interview sessions during our analysis.

The selection of two-on-one interviews was made to increase the trustworthiness of our data collection and its findings (Cooper & Shelley, 2009). We aimed to reduce our biases by diversifying the interviewer perspectives to limit subjectivity. This was accomplished by two interviewers conducting the interview in a semi-structured format of data collection, allowing for follow-up to participant responses from predetermined interview questions. It also allowed the initial interview teams to give objective recommendations to the subsequent interview teams on data collection strategies.

The researchers collected demographic information before the interviews to measure correlations between held identities and participant experiences. The information collected included: their role in Kelley FUTURES as a mentor or mentee, their Kelley enrollment status during and after the program, race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background, and parent/guardian education level. We believed it was important to look at this information as the FUTURES program is intended for the benefit of pre-business and directly admitted underrepresented students pursuing a business degree. With this information, we expected to find parallels between interview participants and the target population for the FUTURES program. The researchers used pseudonyms to maintain participant anonymity to KODI stakeholders when discussing findings.

**Data Analysis**

Our team used interviews with Kelley FUTURES mentees in order to gain qualitative data on the experiences of the underrepresented students who have participated in the program. For the qualitative data collected, designated researchers on the team read and identified salient themes from interview responses and used them to formulate the results section of this report. Any conflicting themes to include were subsequently evaluated by other research team members with the consideration on its relevance to literature and alignment with aforementioned research questions. The transcription and coding processes were conducted to make comparisons from themes found in the open-ended responses. In order to maintain the validity and reliability of the data, our team followed the coding procedures outlined by Schuh et al. (2016). With this data, we examined the perceived benefits of the Kelley FUTURES program from the mentors and mentees. Then, we compared their experiences to the mission and intended learning outcomes of the program—as stated by KODI—to assess
similarities and gaps that emerge. While reviewing the responses, consideration for response alignment with the CECE Model was studied to provide implications for practice (Museus, 2014). While the interview questions do not contain questions directly from the CECE survey, the researchers were able to find connections to the CECE indicators within the interview responses.

**Researcher Positionalities**

We recognize the identities, experiences, and subjectivity we hold in conjunction with this research study and assessment. While the members of the research team understand their positionalities in relation to this research study, it is worth noting the influence our positionalities hold in relation to the analysis and implications revealed in this study. Among the six research team members, one identifies as a South-Asian woman, one as a White woman, one as a Black-Muslim woman, one as a White non-binary trans person, one as a Latino man, and one as a Black man. Additionally, one researcher is a Kelley School of Business alumnus who attended the institution examined before this research study was conducted. The research team used their identities to construct their interpretation of the data presented. These collective identities helped us through the data analysis, as some of our experiences relate to experiences surfaced in our findings, which influenced us to highlight these through the Higher Education and Student Affairs Group Assessment Symposium at Indiana University, and in our implications. Given the various marginalized identities held across the research team relative to Indiana University, the researchers sought to bring out the experiences of underrepresented students in this study to better understand their narratives within the context of the Kelley School of Business.

**Results**

In this section, we provide five emergent themes. These themes are finding community, academic disposition, program structure, individualized experiences, and underrepresented, diversity, and inclusion. Then, we turn to the ways in which our findings connect with specific indicators of the CECE model. In these results and throughout our research, “Kelley” is used to refer to the business school at large, and “FUTURES” or “Kelley FUTURES” is used to refer to the specific program.

**Finding Community**

Community was expressed by the participants in a variety of ways. Participants mentioned KODI staff, mentors, speakers, and other mentees in their conversations with our research team. Interest in participating in Kelley FUTURES was expressed by “hoping to meet other people who have the same goals,” meeting “people who come in to talk could be helpful for job searches,” “thought it would be beneficial to hear others perspectives in their careers,” and doing events with other students could help you “feel less stress knowing that you have a group who are in a similar situation.” Seeing other students succeeding is “good to look up to as a first-year,” stated Rosa. Additionally, by being exposed to information, events, and people they would not have known before had they not participated is an indication of expansion of community. Community, both personal and professional, was seen across participant answers in what they hoped for and received, and in turn aligned with aspects of both cultural familiarity and culturally validating environments.
Academic Disposition

Academic dispositions are individual influences that can result from experiencing CECE indicators (Museus, 2014). When asked, “From your experience in Kelley FUTURES, do you feel prepared to continue on your degree path in the Kelley School of Business? Why or why not?” all participants expressed that they did feel prepared. One participant used the word “confident” in their answer. Another participant expressed their mentality of working hard and making the most of your experiences, no matter where you come from. Seeing mentors who are “well-accomplished” also impacted the dispositions of the mentees. Finally, Molly stated, “I know I can reach out to people who can help me (in her degree path)” as a piece of her academic disposition. Aside from FUTURES, Molly also shared that she also looks up to and is inspired by seeing the success of other upper-class students in Kelley. This collectivism and validation were important for these students in a school such as the Kelley School of Business.

Program Structure

Two findings emerged based on program structure. The first was based on mentor and mentee pairing. Comments were made by participants along the lines of wishing to connect more frequently with their mentor. Jack even expressed he wished he was “paired with a mentor sooner” noting that if someone was struggling early on, they may receive their mentor too late to help. Rosa noted how she enjoyed time with her mentor, however, they have not been able to connect since the beginning of the semester. “The KODI office has been late (in pairing mentors),” exclaimed Molly, while Daniela expressed that she is studying abroad next semester and “would have liked to have more face-to-face time,” which she believes is needed in developing relationships.

The second aspect of program structure was the desire for more events. These events could be opportunities to meet others in the program, or professional connections either with faculty, staff, or persons outside of the university. Additionally, when events are only once or twice a month, Jack expressed how many people may not be free to attend at that time due to a class or test. Although students have expressed expanded networks and knowledge of opportunities, there was a desire for more opportunities. Two participants did express enjoying the social event with food at the beginning of the semester and stated that KODI should continue with these events. It was recognized that cultural familiarity, collectivist cultural orientations, and culturally validating environments were felt by students, however, the participants were still hoping for more based from their suggestions in the interviews.

Individualized Experiences

The program structure of FUTURES currently creates individualized experiences for participants that rely on their level of engagement. One finding that has emerged is that while FUTURES is proactive about getting information and events coordinated for and out to students, the level of engagement varies. Rosa shared that she does not link up with her mentor on a continual basis and needs to reach out again, Jack stated that he could not name anyone else in FUTURES, and Daniela spoke of meeting other mentees at the social event and still keeps in touch with some of them. Also, Molly shared about a handful of events, talked of other students by name and what she reached out to them for, and meeting with recruiters that ultimately led to an internship. Aside from her participation in FUTURES, Molly also shared that she goes out of her way to plan ahead, seek out
resources, and regularly meet with an advisor. She mentioned that since all students may not be as proactive, KODI Office should make sure “students are thriving” and “foster community” for students who may not be seeing the information KODI sends for one reason or the other. Additionally, the infrequency of FUTURES events, creates a culture in which participants in FUTURES are in the program without having to actively engage with their mentoring group. Also, participants are introduced to FUTURES in a multitude of ways as none of our participants were introduced to FUTURES in the same way. Rosa was introduced to FUTURES through her involved with the Kelley Prep-Academy, another KODI initiative, and after our interview she shared that she sometimes mixed up the events and activities she did with FUTURES and the Prep-Academy together. Overall, participants end up gaining individualized experiences in the FUTURES program depending on their own personal needs, class schedule, and personal commitment to being actively engaged and seek out their own mentor, and other participants in the program.

**Underrepresented, Diversity and Inclusion**

As a KODI initiative, FUTURES seeks to foster mentoring relationships amongst underrepresented students. One finding that emerged is the way underrepresented is framed in the FUTURES program and influences participants experiences. Participants did not heavily link their participation in the FUTURES program as a diversity and inclusion initiative for underrepresented students. Molly and Daniela only really focused on how FUTURES was “good for” and “helped” underrepresented minorities in Kelley to gather together. Jack even stated, “FUTURES could benefit anyone if they participated” when asked specifically about how FUTURES influenced his experiences as an underrepresented student in Kelley. While Rosa, asked to skip the question entirely after struggling to form an answer. Each participant shared specific features of the FUTURES program that have positively influenced their experiences and connected them to individuals and a community of people who share similar backgrounds. However, the students did not explicitly mention anything that spoke to their experiences as underrepresented students in Kelley, or intentional programing around diversity and inclusion as a result of what was offered by the FUTURES program. If students were better able to “cultivate, sustain, and increase knowledge of their cultures and communities” through FUTURES programming, there would then be more chance to enact culturally relevant knowledge (Museus, 2014, p. 210).

**Connection to Conceptual Framework**

The results from this study have found five CECE indicators of a culturally engaging campus environment. These indicators are seen in the forms of support and expansion of support networks for Kelley FUTURES participants personally and professionally, both of which were outlined in our research questions. Specifically, one was a culturally relevant indicator and four were culturally responsive indicators (Museus, 2014). The following CECE indicators were present in participant responses.

**Cultural familiarity**

Participants shared how opportunities to connect at events with other participants who have shared experiences, particularly in racial diversity and being a standard admit to Kelley, positively impacted them. Rosa shared that they “did
not hear many other perspectives during outreach,” referring to her general campus visit and the focus on direct admits as well as “not having a tour group as diverse as she would have liked.” However, Rosa now feels “less worried” as she has been able to see a group of people that are underrepresented in Kelley and how it is “refreshing.” Molly also shared similar sentiments and stated that it “was really good to see other underrepresented minorities.” Additionally, another participant, Jack, shared how he and his mentor spend a lot of time together and have formed a friendship. His mentor has also assisted him with soliciting advice for classes to take as a standard admit. Each participant said something along the lines of being able to meet other underrepresented students through FUTURES and sharing or connecting with either their mentor or another mentee in the program.

**Collectivist cultural orientations**

Mentees discussed how having mentors who are relatable in combination with the opportunity to share their backgrounds and experiences, contributes to a collectivist culture that helps them feel supported. Rosa shared how everything her mentor shared with her was relatable, and that it was helpful to learn about her mentor’s experience with deciding a major within Kelley. Jack even identified his mentor as his friend and expressed how they naturally have one-on-ones together. Daniela provided another perspective by commenting on how she talked to other students at the social at the beginning of the school year. “It was beneficial for them to hear what I went through, and this even reassured my decisions,” such as “other people thought this and so did I.” Daniela also mentioned that she has remained connected with some of the people she met and has helped them with scheduling. In this situation, FUTURES provided Daniela with the opportunity to benefit from being both the mentor and mentee.

**Culturally validating environments**

Rosa shared that being a part of FUTURES gave her a community of people who have gone through similar experiences. She specifically highlights how FUTURES helped her to embrace her Hispanic culture and heritage in a way she was not able to do in high school. Rosa shared that compared to her high school experience, being in Kelley and FUTURES allowed her to meet a diverse range of people. In high school “anytime someone would see my last name, people would assume I was Hispanic (she is Hispanic and White), but I have not felt that in Kelley. Everyone is so diverse.” When meeting other underrepresented and standard admit students at the social event (which was an introduction to the program where people could meet others in FUTURES and enjoy food) Daniela claimed, “we relate on things going through Kelley.” This also relates to her comments made above about helping others while also being validated in her personal decisions.

Each participant also described their FUTURES experience as a positively affirming space that encourages their academic success through international events and speakers that are culturally familiar to the participants.

**Humanized educational environments**

Participants identified the Kelley FUTURES staff and KODI in general as individuals who contribute to students’ support. Jack states, “KODI talks to mentees all the time through email (about events) and at events they will stay after to answer questions. To me, this is showing that they care.” Daniela also felt care and commitment from the KODI office describing the office as “really beneficial.
because they did not push me away and still
gave me the opportunity were open to me
being a mentee as a junior.” FUTURES is
typically a program for first year students,
however, KODI still allowed Daniela to
participate, which she appreciated in terms
of her professional development.

Proactive philosophies

Each participant shared how attending events hosted by Kelley
FUTURES helped them in some way professionally or personally. Jack
specifically resonated with the speaker who is a professor for the Kelley Compass
course, which is a course that helps students learn about themselves. He took a test
through this Kelley FUTURES event and was able to learn from the speaker “where to
look and how to know what is good for you” in regard to finding future internships. Rosa
shared, “Whenever I go to the events, I
know I have these people that have gone
through experiences that I’m going
go through,” this has helped students make
connections with others across Kelley as
well as work together to plan ahead. Another
one of our participants, Molly, was able to
share how FUTURES specifically helped
her land a summer internship. By attending
one of the FUTURES sponsored dinner
events, Molly was able to sit at a table with
a recruiter from a large consulting firm
where she was able to get information on the
company and application process. Molly
shared that having face time with the
recruiter at the FUTURES event helped her
land the internship.

Limitations

Despite the rich qualitative data
collected, we encountered quite a few
limitations in our study. One such limitation
was the difficulty we experienced recruiting
students for focus group interviews to
collect data. As a group, we promoted the
opportunity to take part in our research
study to students who were identified as
Kelley FUTURES mentors and mentees
through emails, flyers, and postings that
professors would put up on slideshows
during the beginning of their classes.
Throughout the study, we found that many
students were either unresponsive to the
emails and flyers that were sent to them or
were not showing up to the focus group
interviews for which they scheduled.
Receiving few student responses limited our
research in terms of collecting data with
focus groups. In shifting to individual
interviews, more students signed up, but the
number was still limited. There were many
instances where students either did not show
up to the time they had originally scheduled
and had to reschedule, and four students
stopped responding to our communications
without rescheduling. Additionally, all
participants we conducted individual
interviews with fell into the mentee
category, thus not allowing us to capture the
mentor experience as we had originally
planned. A larger limitation within that
could have been that students did not feel
connected enough to the program to make a
time commitment and interview. For the
interviews that we did conduct, there were
instances where we had to pose multiple
follow-up questions in order to fully
understand the students’ experiences with
the Kelley FUTURES mentoring program.

On an organizational level, the
stakeholders we worked with throughout
this assessment project had a small staff and
went through drastic staffing changes
throughout the months of our assessment.
This impacted our study because our
stakeholders had a small office staff to begin
with, so certain staff members took on more
responsibilities as people transitioned out of
the office. If we had worked with
stakeholders who had a larger office, the
responsiveness and student involvement may have been greater which could have strengthened our findings.

Discussion

Participant responses revealed that mentees benefitted from the career and social opportunities Kelley FUTURES provided, including opportunities to interact with other Kelley students who held underrepresented identities. These findings reflected the elements of strong peer mentoring programs found in the literature. It connects to the notion of a mutually beneficial relationship that is carried out between mentors and mentees—as seen with other underrepresented students who have peer avenues for support. Unfortunately, we were not able to draw conclusions on benefits of the program for mentors because we only interviewed mentees. As stated previously, students mentioned elements of the program that reflected culturally validating environments, collectivist cultural orientation, proactive philosophies, and cultural familiarity. Elements of culturally validating environments appear in the opportunities Kelley FUTURES provides for mentees to meet other students with similar goals and to see upperclassmen students succeeding in their field of study. Collectivist cultural orientation and proactive philosophies show up in the increased confidence students mentioned as a result of being able to connect with people who shared similar experiences. Both of these indicators also appeared in students’ feelings of preparedness to continue in the Kelley School of Business. Lastly, the program’s exemplification of cultural familiarity was apparent in the representation of underrepresented students that mentees found within Kelley FUTURES.

In accordance with the information gleaned from interviews, we found that the program has room to improve its program structure and create more intentional programming around diversity and inclusion. Even though cultural familiarity was present in Kelley FUTURES to a certain degree, we concluded that it could be reiterated in other events because the intent behind programming intended to be directly related to diversity and inclusion was sometimes vague. This connects to literature that supports the need for underrepresented students to have facets of peer mentorship that discuss marginalization. Programming that intentionally speaks to the existence of oppressive forces against underrepresented students provides opportunities for these students to better connect with learning outcomes because of its relatability. Additionally, greater outreach and recruitment efforts, earlier mentee-mentor pairing, and increased frequency of events would satisfy the improvement needs some students mentioned with regards to program structure.

Aside from implementing some of the changes participants suggested during interviews, Kelley FUTURES might consider further assessing the program to see whether student opinions shift, and how they might continuously improve to meet the ever-evolving needs of students. Even though our group experienced difficulty recruiting participants for interviews, we were able to learn a substantial amount of information about the FUTURES program by inviting student narratives in response to our questions, rather than relying on standardized survey responses. Interviews also allowed us to probe deeper into students’ responses and take into account body language and voice inflections. Therefore, we suggest that Kelley FUTURES utilize interviews or focus groups to consistently gain insight into the
student ideas about the program. We did not learn why students were hesitant to participate in our study but attributed the hesitancy to our status as “outsiders” of the FUTURES program, and to a possible lack of student commitment to the program. We would be interested to see if students respond differently to interview outreach coming directly from Kelley FUTURES program staff or mentors.

In sum, the four Kelley FUTURES mentees we interviewed reported feeling supported—at least in some capacity—by the Kelley FUTURES program. They appreciated the opportunities the program provided for them to connect with other underrepresented students in the Kelley School of Business, and to observe the success of their mentors as indicative of their ability to succeed in Kelley and beyond. Simultaneously, mentees mentioned that the FUTURES program could improve its outreach efforts, mentee-mentor pairing timeline, and frequency of FUTURES-sponsored diversity and inclusion events. Our research team suggests that, in addition to implementing the aforementioned changes, Kelley FUTURES continue to assess student experiences within the program via interviews or focus groups, and gauge further changes to the program accordingly.

Implications

Despite the aforementioned limitations, our research revealed several implications that have the potential to inform the future practice of KODI staff, or staff overseeing similar programs. Along with explanations of the implications, our team provides suggestions for how KODI might hone the FUTURES program’s current strengths and address areas for growth. This section of our report touches on program notoriety, meetings and events, communication with current and potential members, and utilizing the mentor-mentee relationship to further program success.

Throughout our data collection, participants shared their insights on FUTURES. These insights included two of our interviewees mentioning that Kelley FUTURES was not well-known within Kelley. In particular, Rosa stated that she had to explain Kelley FUTURES to peers when mentioning it in conversation because her peers had not heard of the program before. At one point, members of our research team tried to recruit participants by approaching students at the Kelley School of Business to ask if they were involved in FUTURES and would like to participate in an interview. No students agreed to interview when approached in person and, according to our research team members, most stated that they had never heard of Kelley FUTURES. Both Rosa’s comment and the feedback our research team received when recruiting in-person raise concerns about KODI’s promotion of the FUTURES program. Jack stated that he was introduced to Kelley FUTURES by someone he met in his residence hall, rather than by a KODI staff member or advertisement. While word-of-mouth could be a promising practice for gaining interest in the program, we suggest that other types of outreach and promotion should be used moving forward. Suggestions for outreach include emailing all new/incoming Kelley students at the start of the academic year, asking faculty to share information about Kelley FUTURES during class, and promoting the FUTURES program and events in ways that make them more visible to students throughout Kelley. This information drove us to the conclusion that earlier and more widespread communication about the program could increase Proactive Philosophies by allowing students to become acquainted with the program and their mentors closer to the start
of the semester. Additionally, early communication would provide an opportunity for students to benefit from the program’s elements of collectivist cultural orientation and cultural familiarity earlier in their Kelley experience (Museus, 2014).

During interviews, Jack expressed a desire to see Kelley FUTURE host more events for its members, while Rosa hoped for more opportunities to meet and interact with other students in the program. Jack stated that FUTURE programming typically generates low attendance, due in part to conflicts in student schedules that prevent them from attending. Jack hypothesized that hosting more events might increase attendance and encourage students to be more involved in Kelley FUTURE. While Molly said she didn’t have many recommendations for program improvement, she stated that she appreciated the events Kelley FUTURE hosted at the start of the year and that she hoped the program would continue to host those events moving forward. Kelley FUTURE could address the concerns revealed in our interviews by hosting more FUTURE-specific events, co-hosting events with other student groups, and integrating formal, casual, meet-and-greet, or social activities into the program. Since FUTURE wants to "expand support networks and gain awareness of professional opportunities," as described by the assistant director, more events and partnerships could assist with these goals.

In regard to relationships with mentors, Rosa and Jack experienced different relationships and insights. Jack developed a friendship with his mentor, while Rosa commented on not having seen hers for quite a while. Despite Jack’s close relationship with his mentor, he felt students could benefit from being paired earlier in the academic year. Daniela echoed similar sentiments to Rosa and Jack, saying she would have liked to connect with her mentor sooner, adding that she did not meet with her mentor until after Thanksgiving Break. Thus, earlier mentor-mentee pairing has the potential to increase the effectiveness of the program’s mentorship component. Earlier mentor-mentee pairings coupled with increased activities/programming led by FUTURE would create more structured opportunities for FUTURE students to connect and interact. Providing base requirements for mentors and mentees to spend time together might also be an effective way to increase mentor/mentee interaction. Based on the data we collected and the feedback we received, our suggestions of focusing on program notoriety, meetings and events, communication with current and potential members, and utilizing the mentor-mentee relationship would enhance the Kelley FUTURE program.

**Conclusion**

The presence of peer mentoring programs for students have clearly been effective in providing benefits to those who participate. In particular, creating planned mentorship relationships for underrepresented students in spaces where natural mentorship may not be prevalent is something that our team hopes KODI continues to implement. The value this research holds is to inform KODI how Kelley FUTURE has been benefitting their participants, but also recognizing for growth as described by students. We believe incorporating more environmental aspects and identity validating strategies founded in the CECE model can further shape the experiences and outcomes of diverse student populations in the Kelley FUTURE program in a positive way.
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Appendices

Appendix A

Part 1

Chosen Pseudonym: ________________________________

Are you completing this focus group as a previous Kelley FUTURES mentor or mentee?
● Mentor
● Mentee
(Mentees Only) If completing this focus group as a previous mentee, what was your status at the time of your participation in Kelley FUTURES?

- Pre-Business Student
- Direct Admit to Kelley
- Other: ______________________

(Mentees Only) At this current time you are:

- Pre-Business Student
- Kelley Business Student
- Other Program: ______________________

What race do you identify with? (select all that apply)

- Alaska Native, American Indian, or Native American
- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Latina/Latino/Latinx
- Middle Eastern or Northern African
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Multiracial
- I prefer to self-describe: ______________
- I prefer not to respond

What is your ethnicity? ______________

What is your gender identity? (select all that apply)

- Agender
- Androgyne
- Demigender
- Genderqueer or gender fluid
- Man
- Questioning or unsure
- Trans man
- Trans woman
- Woman
- I prefer to self-describe: ______________
- I prefer not to respond
What describes your class background growing up?
- Working class
- Middle class
- Upper class (Rich)

What is the highest level of education completed by any of your parents/guardians who raised you?
- Did not finish high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college, but did not complete a college certificate or degree
- College certificate
- Associate’s Degree (AA) or equivalent
- Bachelor’s Degree (BA, BS) or equivalent
- Master’s Degree (MA, MBA, MEd, MFA) or equivalent
- Doctoral or Professional Degree (EdD, JD, MD, PhD) or equivalent
- I don’t know
- Not applicable

Appendix B

Script (Given to all mentee participants before focus group)
Thank you for your participation in this focus group. During this focus group, a series of questions will be asked by a facilitator about your experiences in Kelley FUTURES. Your responses will be recorded by another member of the research team and transcribed for research purposes only.

Questions asked in this focus group are pre-existing questions. The facilitator may ask follow-up questions during the course of the focus group if applicable to the research team.

You are welcome to leave this focus group at any time without any subject to penalty. Withdrawing your participation in this focus group will not affect your standing at the Kelley School of Business or Indiana University.

The focus group is expected to last between 60-90 minutes.

Focus Group Questions
- Why did you choose to pursue a degree in the Kelley School of Business? What factors were relevant to you in your decision-making process?
- Thus far, how would you say your experience has been taking courses in the Kelley School of Business?
- How did you hear about the Kelley FUTURES program?
• Why were you interested in participating as a mentee in the Kelley FUTURES program? What were you hoping to learn or gain from the program?
• Specifically, has Kelley FUTURES influenced your experience as an underrepresented student in the Kelley School Business? If yes, how so? Provide examples. If no, why not? Provide examples.
• Who, if anyone, has influenced your professional development in Kelley FUTURES (for example: mentors, faculty/staff, other students, professionals in the area)? How did you meet/how were you introduced to this person(s)? How have they influenced you?
• As an underrepresented student, do you feel the initiatives in KODI and Kelley FUTURES effectively support your success (i.e. personal, academic, and professional)? Explain.
• From your experience in Kelley FUTURES, do you feel prepared to continue on your degree path in the Kelley School of Business? Why or why not?
• Are you a current mentor for Kelley FUTURES or would you want to be a mentor in the future? Why or why not?
• If any, what recommendations do you have for Kelley FUTURES for its future development?
• Are there any responses from this focus group that you want to elaborate further?

Script (Given to all participants after focus group)
If there were responses not shared during the focus group that you wish to share privately with the research team, please see the facilitator following the conclusion of the focus group.

The research team asks that you not share your responses or the responses of others outside of this focus group.

This concludes the focus group portion of this research. The research team would like to thank you for your participation. You are welcome to leave at this point.