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### Do Relationships Still Make Great Colleges?

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# Do Relationships Still Make Great Colleges?

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Paul A. Djupe

March 9, 2022

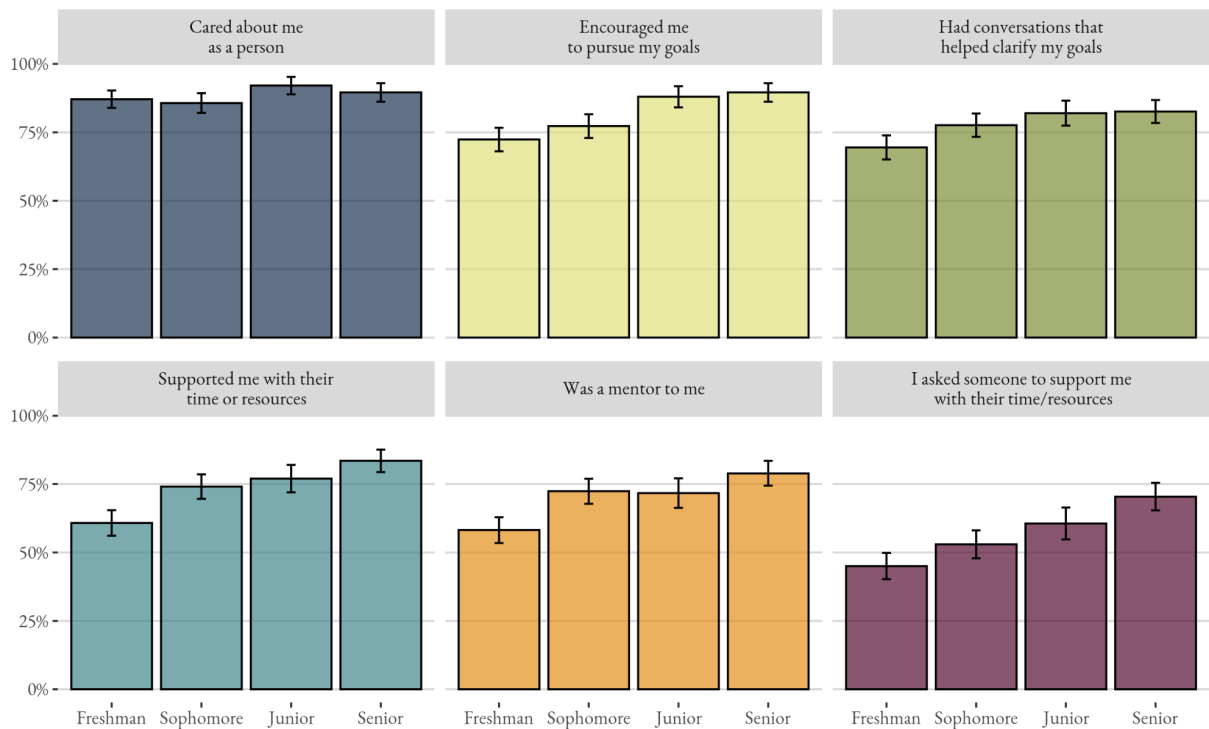
By Paul A. Djupe

[Image credit: Logan Mallory]

While the backbone of a Denison education is what happens in coursework, relationships formed in and out of the classroom are what make it great. In conversation and through working together on common projects, students learn how to translate their coursework into active citizenship and all the mission statement goodness. Mentoring relationships, says Adam Weinberg, act “as catalysts for students, encouraging them to ask good questions, develop goals, and learn to achieve....produc[ing] intellectual and ethical growth.” Are Denison students seeking out and receiving these sorts of mentoring relationships with faculty and staff?

In our February 2022 survey of 512 students, we reprised questions about mentorship at Denison that we asked before in the spring of 2018 (with the best cover photo of any on 127 – thanks Logan Mallory!). We think that mentorship is generally about support that is reflected in the range of questions we asked – about concern, encouragement, processing, and investment. The results concerning faculty are in the figure below. The rates of reporting the various forms of mentorship are high and grow across the four years to above 75 percent of the senior class. Notably, mentorship occurs whether students ask for it or not (bottom right panel), which suggests (rightly!) that faculty are looking for opportunities to have these conversations. But asking for support is much more likely to net you a mentoring relationship with faculty.

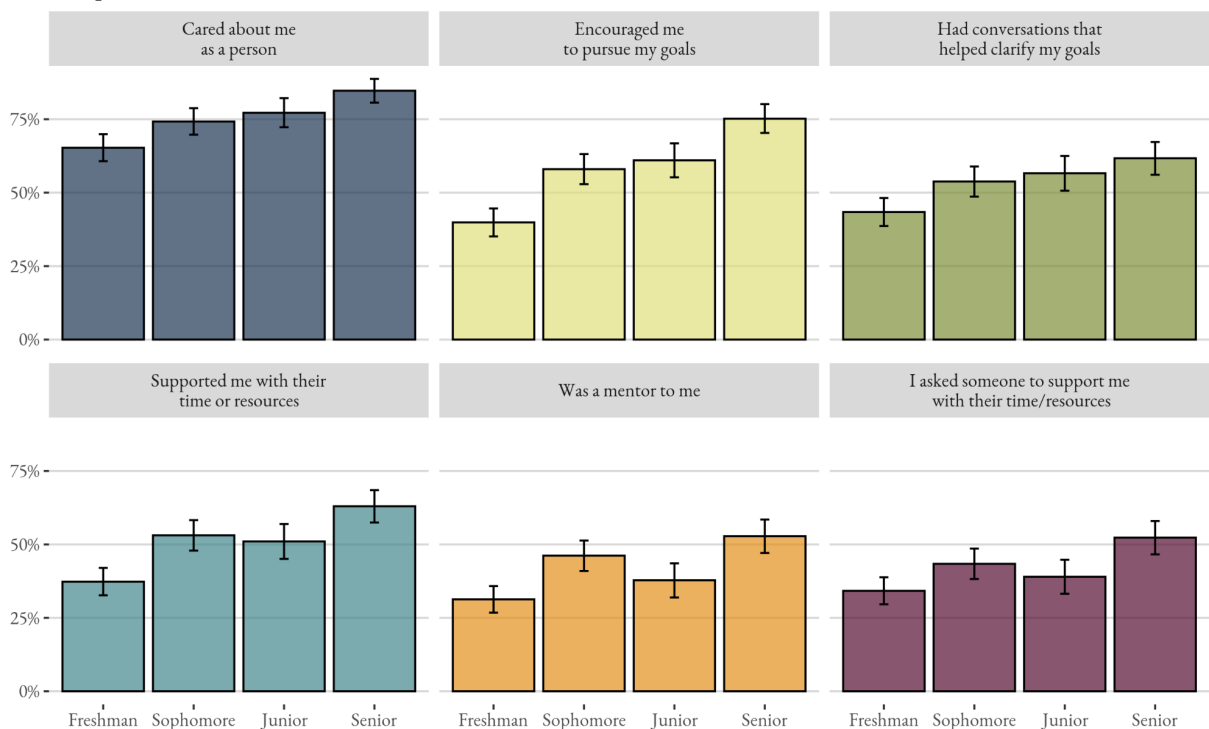
## Mentorship From Faculty is High and Saturates Over Time



Source: February 2022 Survey.

Support and mentorship from **university staff** is less common than from faculty (see below), but it grows with time so that a majority of seniors note staff mentorship and, generally, staff going above and beyond to support our students. It's no surprise that those who are more involved in campus groups report more staff support and mentorship, but it's especially common among varsity athletes – two thirds of whom report staff (ahem, coach) mentorship compared to just a third of everyone else. There is no either/or between staff and faculty, it's both – fully 88 percent of those who have a staff mentor report having a faculty mentor (vs 55 percent having a faculty mentor when they don't have a staff mentor).

### Mentorship From Staff is Lower But Still Grows Over Time



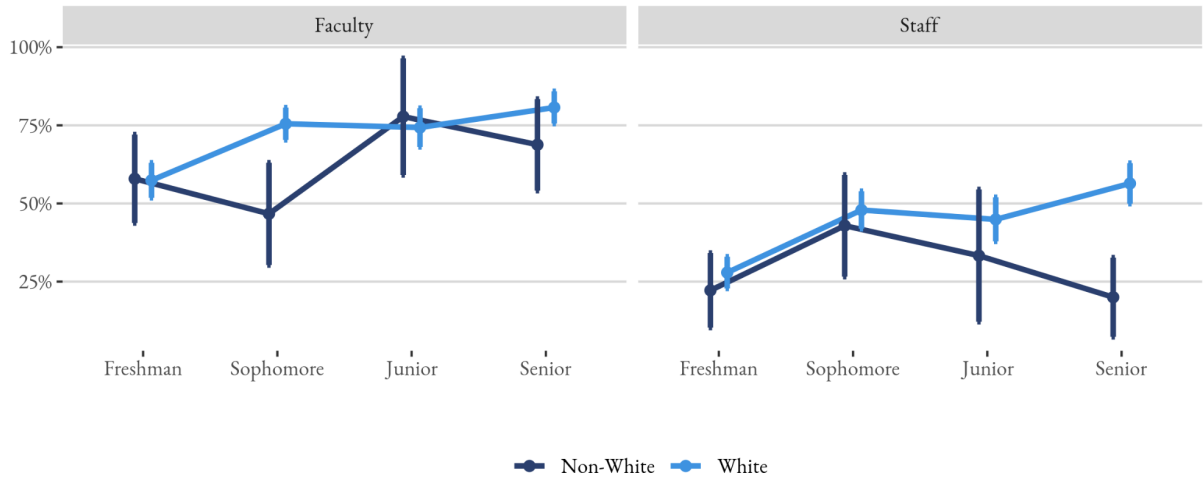
Source: February 2022 Survey.

We couldn't help but wonder whether mentorship is at least in part a function of knowing how to do college. That is, feeling comfortable seeking out help from faculty and staff is a mark of mentorship, too, probably from parents who have college+ educations themselves. So, is there a gap in reporting a mentoring relationship between first generation college students and others? Yes. In our data, 57 percent of first gens report a faculty mentoring relationship (36 percent staff) compared to 71 percent of non-first gen students (42 percent staff). It's not an enormous gap, but it is a real one.

The same sort of pattern may overlap with race, which the following figure explores. Non-white students (we left out international students for this analysis) lag behind white students in having faculty and staff mentors consistently, but only by a small amount. Both groups generally increase in faculty mentorship across their four years except for sophomore non-whites. On the staff side, non-white students start climbing, but then drop off after sophomore year. We asked around and there do not seem to be any programmatic reasons for this. It's hard not to picture the role of COVID in this, as the Junior and Senior classes had chances to make friends before COVID changed how we live our lives, while Sophomores were stuck with severe COVID regulations their first year – the year many make their core friendships. By the way, we checked to see if race interacts with first gen status, but no – the same first gen gap can be seen among non-whites vs among whites.

## Non-Whites Tend to Lag Slightly in Mentorship

Percent Responding 'Yes' to 'Someone was a mentor to me.'



Source: February 2022 Survey.

When 127 wrote about mentoring before, we also had asked about student mentors, which were almost as common as faculty mentorship. All kinds of mentorship were more common with a student's level of involvement in campus life. We went one step further and demonstrated how important mentorship is to satisfaction with Denison overall. The effect of mentorship is in line with the effect of satisfaction with social life, academics, and extracurriculars. One might even go so far as to say it's a necessary component of the college experience.

Mentorship is a function of being an engaged citizen of the campus community. Citizenship puts you in place to work with faculty and staff closely, but also means you are pursuing opportunities that will rise to asking them for their support and what they think about your plans. Being involved and doing good work naturally attracts others to your cause; it is a signal marker of doing college right, but also being at the right college.

Paul A. Djupe is a local cyclist who runs the Data for Political Research minor. He started onetwentyseven.blog a few years ago in a bid to subsidize collective action. He's on Twitter and you should be too, along with your president.