

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: FORMAL MENTORING PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS OF COLOR IN THE ACADEMY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF STUDENT AND FACULTY EXPERIENCES

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Numerous formal mentoring programs (FMPs) exist within the context of higher education (Gershenfeld, 2014). Further, the federal government has put in place many programs to support minority students to the professoriate and these programs are widespread across the nation. Despite the prevalence of programs and national interest, empirical research dedicated to studying FMPs designed to support minority students through the faculty pipeline remains scant in the higher education literature with the exception of a limited number of studies (e.g., Charleston, Gilbert, Escobar, & Jackson, 2014; Davis, 2008; Smith, 2007). To address this gap, I examined the experiences of 11 faculty and 11 students involved in the Future Faculty program—an FMP designed to mentor students to graduate school and beyond. Through an interpretive epistemology and phenomenological method process, I interviewed participants to learn their experiences working in partnership with a mentee or mentor in the bounded system of the Future Faculty program situated at a public, Midwestern, predominantly White, four-year institution. Through the interpretive phenomenological analysis method (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), I found that the experience was a process of teaching, learning, discovery,

pathfinding, community, challenge, need fulfillment, role-playing, and goal-setting for students and faculty in the program. These themes suggest that faculty mentors are instrumental in guiding and motivating students of color to consider and pursue graduate school and that they play numerous roles as they work to adapt to a variety of student needs. Further, these findings support the anecdotal evidence presented throughout the years that mentoring and mentoring programs matter and influence students in positive ways that lead them to graduate school, the professoriate, and into the role of mentor for others.