

## **A Qualitative Study of Interdisciplinary Near-Peer Research Mentoring in Professional Training**

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### **Abstract**

Although literature on interdisciplinary training has shown some promise for enabling students to cross disciplinary barriers, little is known about how being mentors to near-peers in other disciplines could initiate psychology trainees into their future role in a multidisciplinary team. This article aims to describe the experiences of psychology and urban planning students who participated in a near-peer interdisciplinary research mentoring program to understand how psychology trainees could benefit from interdisciplinary collaboration. Three focus group discussions were conducted with the students about their experiences of the program and a thematic analysis was performed on the data to distill themes focusing on the interdisciplinary aspects of the mentoring. Four themes regarding the students' experiences were generated: challenges regarding disciplinary roles, challenges regarding the clarity of interdisciplinary collaboration, the value of interdisciplinary collaboration for academic outcomes, and the value of interdisciplinary mentoring for professional identities. The findings indicate that, despite experiencing some challenges, students from different disciplines can benefit from guiding and being guided through the

research and writing process. In particular the psychology students were able to see how their role as mentors contributed to the development of their personal and professional identities as future researchers. Interdisciplinary collaboration may present psychology trainees with an opportunity to demonstrate the unique contribution that psychology can make to a shared issue and assist them to develop a collective, multiple understanding of a research topic that could also model power sharing with clients.

**Keywords:** professional training; research psychology; mentoring; interdisciplinary skills; near-peer mentoring

Although psychologists can contribute to interdisciplinary solutions for society's complex problems, higher education tends to prepare them to be specialists in their area of study (Belar, 2016; Johnson, 2012; Koch & Vogt, 2015). Koch and Vogt (2015) consequently argue for "intensified interdisciplinary networking...for psychology teaching in particular" (p. 159). The value of interdisciplinary alliances for professional psychologists has been widely noted (Belar, 2016; Bluestein & Cubic, 2009; DeLeon, Sells, Cassidy, Waters, & Kasper, 2015; Larkin, 2014; Maton, Perkins, & Saegert, 2006; Toporek & Vaughn, 2010). It is therefore timely that the new APA Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology (SoA) (2017) requires doctoral students to demonstrate competence in interprofessional/interdisciplinary skills. The SoA also calls for research expertise. The Blueprint for Health Service Psychology Education and Training similarly prioritizes these proficiencies and suggests collecting promising examples of how science and practice are integrated as well as how psychology interfaces with other disciplines (Health Service Psychology Education Collaborative, 2013).

The literature on interdisciplinary training has shown some promise for enabling students to cross disciplinary barriers, particularly in STEM fields (see e.g., Foley, 2016; Juhl, Yearsley, & Silva, 1997; Killeen, 2001). Approaches to collaboration across disciplines include students working together on a project (see e.g., Koch, Dirsch-Weigand, Awolin, Pinkelman, & Hampe, 2017; Kricsfalusy, George, & Reed, 2016; Margolies et al., 2013; Sutton & Kemp, 2006) and mentoring students in interdisciplinary research (see e.g., Adedokun, Bessenbacher, Parker, Kirkham, & Burgess, 2013; Davis, Mahatmya, Garner, & Jones, 2015; Dodson, Montgomery, & Brown, 2009; Feldman, Divoll, & Rogan-Klyve, 2013; Gardner, Jansujwicz, Hutchins, Cline, & Levesque, 2014). Emerging work in psychology education has revealed successful partnerships between psychology and other disciplines. Blustein and Cubic (2009) described a training program that prepares clinical psychologists to provide integrated care in primary health settings by designing treatments for patients together with resident physicians and found that both professions benefitted with psychology interns showing competencies in understanding the interaction between health and behavior and the medical interns developing competencies in behavioral issues. (See also Belar (2016) for further examples of interprofessional training for clinical psychologists in the US.) Collaboration between psychology, history and political science students to build undergraduate research initiatives has “provided learning opportunities, sustainable programs of research, and a broader understanding of research” (Kitchens, Dolan, Hinshaw, & Johnson, 2010, p. 20). Evaluations of interdisciplinary programs for law and psychology students have found that they increased the students’ knowledge in both disciplines (and how this knowledge is applied to practice) and were enjoyable and beneficial educational experiences for them (Holtzworth-Munroe, Applegate, Rudd, Freeman, & D’Onofrio, 2013; Weinberg & Harding, 2004).

The benefits of mentoring in health service psychology doctoral training programs is also receiving attention (Cobb, Zamboanga, Xie, Schwartz, Meca, & Sanders, 2017) although these authors “note the dearth of current studies on mentoring prevalence in health service psychology, and that more research is greatly needed in this area” (p. 4). The focus of the Cobb et al. study is on graduate students receiving mentoring. There is scant information on how graduate psychology trainees could benefit from being mentors, especially the ways in which interdisciplinary research mentoring could initiate them into their future role in a multidisciplinary team. The aim of this article is to describe how a near-peer interdisciplinary research mentoring program was experienced by the students who participated in it and to understand how psychology trainees could benefit from interdisciplinary collaboration. In the context of this program near-peer mentoring is defined as an “approach [that] allows for the students with more experience, regardless of age, to serve as a peer or near-peer mentor on a research project, which can also enrich the experience of the student mentors and result in a number of learning gains for the peer-mentors themselves” (Edgcomb et al., 2010, p. 18). As suggested by the Blueprint the description of this program could also serve as an example of psychology’s articulation with other disciplines in the context of (research methods) training. Some of the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration for professional psychology trainees are identified.

## **Method**

We chose a qualitative approach for the study, in particular social phenomenology, partly because of the small number of students involved, but also because it affords researchers insight into how people subjectively experience and make sense of their worlds (Willig, 2013). Social phenomenology makes the assumption “that people living in the world of daily life are able to ascribe meaning to a situation and then make judgments” (Fereday &

Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 81). We wanted to understand what it was like to participate in the near-peer research mentoring program and the meanings that the students attached to their subjective experiences of the program, particularly in relation to the interdisciplinary collaboration. To access the students' subjective experiences our research design consisted of focus group discussions and thematic analysis of the data. Focus group discussions were used as the data collection method since we were interested in the interaction between the students that would generate their shared experiences of the mentoring program and the data-analytic strategy of thematic analysis (when used with social phenomenology) enabled us to "capture the meanings attributed by participants to their experiences and help the researcher[s] make sense of the participants' actions" (Willig, 2013, p. 59). As interdisciplinary peer mentoring is difficult to evaluate directly, rich descriptions of a program (provided in the section that follows) can assist in its academic assessment (Goring et al., 2014).

### **Description of the Near-peer Mentoring Program**

A coursework master's degree is required to become a psychologist in South Africa (as opposed to a doctorate in the US). One of the specialization routes is 'research psychology' that trains students in a broad range of skills in the social sciences while specializing in psychological research. Although research psychology is not a category of professional registration in the USA (Rascher, 2016), a cursory internet search reveals that a number of tertiary institutions offer a similar degree. In order to simulate the interdisciplinary and professional skills that the workplace often requires of research psychologists, the authors, one from psychology and one from urban planning, developed an interdisciplinary near-peer research mentoring program in which the psychology master's students mentored undergraduate urban planning students to help them write their final-year

research reports as part of a four-year professional bachelor's degree. We have a common interest in environment-behavior studies and developed a project about recycling behavior in gated communities. Our collaboration could be classified as composite interdisciplinarity "where issues form the main propelling force for integration...around which disciplines come together providing their own insights and expertise" (Chettiparamb, 2011, p. 72).

Although we chose a formal mentoring approach (the lecturers initiated the program, matched the mentors and mentees, and prescribed the relationship – see Cobb et al. (2017)) because there are otherwise rarely opportunities for students to interact across disciplines (Weinberg & Harding, 2004), we asked the psychology students whether they would be willing to participate in the program beforehand and they enthusiastically agreed. The planning students were given several research projects to choose from and they were informed that the research project on recycling behavior would also entail being mentored by a psychology student. The 10 urban planning students who chose the recycling behavior project were required to plan, conduct and write up the results of a survey about recycling behavior in enclosed housing estates. The six psychology students were required to mentor the planning students in all of the aspects of the project without being involved in the fieldwork. The lecturers were available throughout the collaboration: they secured entry for the fieldwork in gated communities, they attended and gave information and feedback in the workshops, and supervised the research process. For the sake of getting the project approved by the ethics committee in time and to enable standardized data collection the lecturers provided the students with a pre-developed questionnaire for the recycling behavior research, but the planning students were encouraged to conceptualize their own research questions for their individual reports. The urban planning lecturer assessed the final research reports that were submitted by the planning students and the psychology lecturer evaluated the quality of

the mentorship that the psychology students provided based on the feedback they provided to their mentees.

The collaboration lasted for one semester (from July to November) and included meetings and workshops to prepare for the various research activities. In the first meeting the two groups of students and their lecturers were introduced to one another and the structure, purpose, roles and responsibilities of the near-peer mentoring program was explained to the students. One workshop was held where both groups of students presented their summary of the literature on recycling (to introduce each other to their discipline's perspective on the topic), a second workshop was held where the psychology students did fieldwork training with the urban planning students (including a role-play for administering the recycling behavior questionnaire) and in a third workshop the psychology students provided guidance to the planning students on data analysis using SPSS. Thereafter each urban planning student was assigned a psychology student as a mentor (some mentors taking on more than one mentee) after which the planning students started their fieldwork for the recycling behavior survey. The mentors and mentees were encouraged to have one-on-one meetings to discuss the research and report-writing. We began the inquiry into the students' subjective experiences of the program once the mentoring process had been completed so that a summative exploration of their experiences could be done.

### **Participants**

As a small number of students were involved in the mentoring program, it was possible to invite all 16 of them to participate voluntarily in two of three different focus groups. The first focus group included the urban planning students (i.e., the mentees), the second included the research psychology students (i.e., the mentors), and the third included a random selection of half the planning students and half the psychology students in order to

have a manageable sized group. We selected the participants by randomly sampling 50% of the members from each group using MS Excel. A random number was allocated to each group member and the first half of members were selected in order from the smallest to largest number. The purpose of having three different groups was to allow each discipline's students an opportunity to first speak in confidentiality regarding their experiences as a group of mentors as opposed to mentees, followed by a combined group to cross-check views regarding experiences and to stimulate further ideas regarding the near-peer mentoring program, particularly the interdisciplinary collaboration.

The composition of the focus groups is illustrated in Table 1. Two students, one from planning and one from psychology, did not attend the focus groups. The age of the urban planning students ranged from 22 - 23 with seven males and three females and the psychology students from 23 – 28 years with one male and four females. Three of the four population groups, as measured by Statistics South Africa, were represented: 8 White and 1 Colored student in urban planning; 3 White and 1 Indian student in psychology. Eleven of the 14 participants reported Afrikaans as their home language, one reported Afrikaans and English as his/her home language and two reported English as their home language.

Table 1  
*Composition of Focus Groups*

Focus group	Focus group members	Class size	Number of focus group members
1	Urban planning students (mentees)	10	9
2	Research psychology students (mentors)	6	5
3	Random sample of psychology and urban planning students	10 (urban planning) 6 (psychology)	5 (urban planning) 3 (psychology)

## Data Collection

A research assistant in the Department of Town and Regional Planning contacted the students via email to invite them to the focus groups and assisted in making the arrangements. We received a small grant from the Department of Higher Education and Training which allowed us to contract the services of an independent research consultant to facilitate the

focus groups. The lecturers were not involved in facilitating any of the focus groups so that the student participants could speak freely about their experiences. We briefed the consultant beforehand and provided a semi-structured focus group discussion guide based on the following research question: How did the student mentors and mentees experience the near-peer mentoring with regards to interdisciplinary collaboration on a research project? Probing questions aimed to elicit the students' experiences of the mentoring program, for example, "What were the most important experiences you had?", "What did you experience in your interdisciplinary collaboration?", and "What did you learn about research?". The literature on mentoring (e.g., that there are both benefits and challenges in the relationship) also informed the discussion questions. Although most of the participants reported Afrikaans as their home language the focus groups were conducted in English (as a commonly spoken language in South Africa) to accommodate those who were not conversant in Afrikaans.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Humanities and the Built Environment Faculties and all participants signed an informed consent form. Each focus group lasted between one and two hours and was sound-recorded. The independent focus group facilitator met with the lecturers after the data were collected to discuss her impressions of the groups and any key elements to note. An independent transcription company transcribed the focus group recordings. Scribes were not able to identify students or label transcriptions as students were asked to refrain from making references to themselves. The transcriptions were first sent to the focus group facilitator who assessed their quality in relation to the audio recordings and were then handed to us without the original sound recordings to ensure anonymity of responses.

## **Data Analysis**

The aim of our analysis was to generate themes that would describe the students' experiences of the interdisciplinary aspects of the mentoring program and provide us with an understanding of how psychology trainees could benefit from it. We followed Hesse-Biber's (2017) guidelines for analyzing focus group data: Step 1: Reading over each focus group and taking notes, asking questions such as: 'What is going on?' and 'Were there any unexpected findings?'. Hesse-Biber explains that notes (or memos) are brief thoughts that summarize the findings of a focus group discussion and include ideas about the connection to the research questions. Step 2: Reading each line of the transcript of a group and coding for meaning keeping in mind that the codes needed to be placed into overarching categories, or themes, which are described as the "the major ideas contained with the overall focus group discussion" (p. 177). Step 3: The codes formed categories and sub-categories which became our themes. For example, we did not expect to find that the planning students thought of the research psychology students as 'therapists', we coded it as 'lack of understanding of another discipline' and placed it into the theme that deals with clarity about interdisciplinary collaboration.

The authors independently analyzed the data using the steps described above and, to ensure the validity of the analysis as well as to obtain substantial understanding of our data, we followed Hesse-Biber's (2017) suggestion of speaking with fellow team members who are analyzing the same data. Our research team consisted of the first author who teaches qualitative research and environmental psychology in the research psychology master's program and the second author who teaches research methods in urban planning and also holds a PhD in social research methods. This was our first experience of interdisciplinary teaching and research which we enjoyed and intuitively felt that the students had benefitted from it, but we were curious about the students' experiences. During and after the analysis

period the first and second authors had a number of conversations about the data and how the analysis could be improved as well as possible interpretations of what the students had said. We were attentive to the possibility that we might have focused on the positive experiences of the mentoring program and verified with each other that we had identified a diversity of experiences in the data. This type of verification helps to avoid possible errors in understanding the data as the analysis progresses and guarantees that the analyst(s) is paying careful attention to the participant's voices in answering the research questions.

## **Findings**

For the purposes of this article the findings focus on the interdisciplinary aspects of the experiences of the near-peer mentoring program. We identified four themes: challenges regarding disciplinary roles, challenges regarding the clarity of the interdisciplinary collaboration, the value of interdisciplinary mentoring for academic outcomes and the value of interdisciplinary mentoring for professional identities.

### **Theme 1: Challenges regarding disciplinary roles**

This theme reflects the challenges that the psychology and urban planning students experienced with regards to the roles of their disciplines during the project about recycling behavior in a gated community. As the role of the psychology students was limited to advising the urban planning students on their research they were not involved in the design of the instrument and the actual data collection. This resulted in them experiencing a lack of ownership of the research project. They felt that their skills in questionnaire design and data gathering (for the recycling behavior research) would have benefitted the urban planning students. They would have liked to visit the research site because they did not know what the setting entailed and felt that they had no control over what happened during the data

collection, which could have offered important information about the process. The psychology students felt that they were an “afterthought” and that they had no control over the research process; they were mostly there to criticize the planning students’ writing:

Group 3: It was kind of like we were an ad hoc addition, an afterthought.

So I think everyone at least might have benefitted more if we were in integral part of the process from the start, instead of just a language editing, moaning person.

They felt that being in the field would also have benefitted their professional growth because they do not have enough opportunities to practice as researchers while they are in training:

Group 2: One thing the master’s course lacks is practical experience. This would have been a good opportunity to actually implement [field work and managing fieldworkers] into the course. So it feels like I am stuck behind a desk – it would have been nice to actually do our own research. I wouldn’t have minded doing the extra work to gain that experience.

## **Theme 2: Challenges regarding the clarity of interdisciplinary collaboration**

This theme describes the urban planning students’ experiences with regards to the lack of clarity about the interdisciplinary collaboration as they struggled to locate the interdisciplinary research themes and concepts in a broader context and questioned the purpose of the interdisciplinary collaboration. They felt that the project entailed more psychology than urban planning work:

Group 1: I found that we did more psychology than urban planning. If I knew that [beforehand] I might not have done [this topic].

The planning students felt that they did not understand the role of the psychology students as mentors and misinterpreted the type of skills that research psychology requires:

Group 3: I actually thought you guys would be the person sitting on a chair with people like stretched out on a couch.

Some planning students had a different experience and managed to understand the interdisciplinary context and how to incorporate it into their own disciplinary perspective:

Group 1: I had a different experience... I focused more on the urban planning stuff so in my report I said that the report aims to guide urban planners and policy makers. I just used the psychology part to support why urban planners should improve [the planning and design of enclosed housing complexes].

In addition, the interdisciplinary collaboration left planning students feeling that their discipline was side-lined in the research process. In their opinion they should have more say about the content of the recycling behavior questionnaire and there should be more questions related to issues of space:

Group 1: Initially I wanted to do this topic and as this topic went on I felt restricted. We had a set questionnaire and we couldn't ask any questions

[of our own]. There were a total of four questions around space. You can't really do an honors report around four questions. Maybe consult with the students beforehand and ask them if they [would like to include other questions in the questionnaire].

The psychology students felt that the research was just a means to an end for the planning students and that this separated the two disciplines with regards to what research meant to each group:

Group 2: To us the research was an end in itself. But to them it's kind of just a means [to an end] and that's why they didn't take the methodological aspects that seriously ... a bit of disparity between the goals of the two groups at least.

The psychology students also questioned how they should locate the interdisciplinary research themes and concepts in a broader context and what the purpose of the interdisciplinary collaboration was:

Group 2: I found that quite odd in terms of it's their research project, so why are we doing the literature review? Surely it should have been on urban planning theory or something. I don't understand why we did [the literature review] if it's their project [but] we are [using] our [psychological] theories.

### **Theme 3: The Value of Interdisciplinary Mentoring for Academic Outcomes**

This theme describes the planning students' experiences of the academic outcomes of the interdisciplinary mentoring. They acknowledged the psychology mentors' research expertise as a valuable contribution to their academic projects as they experienced and felt that they benefitted from their input, especially with regards to the SPSS workshop and research writing skills. The mentees said that they learnt a lot from the SPSS workshop and that the mentor who presented it "was very to the point and made it fun". Their research writing skills were enhanced as the psychology students gave them feedback on specific aspects of their writing and they felt that this had given them an advantage over their peers who had not been near-peer mentored:

Group 1: I think compared to other groups we had an advantage, because they didn't have mentor. Also with the comments she gave, she will suggest 'why don't you rather say it this way'. She just made it a bit clearer which way I should reference, which helped a lot.

When asked what they felt they had learnt about research, if anything, the planning students had both positive and negative experiences: One planning student said "I hate it" (because you have to justify every assertion you make with data), whereas another said "I actually started to like research after this because you learn something valuable" (in reference to learning about recycling in the context of the theory of planned behavior which they were not familiar with before).

#### **Theme 4: The Value of Interdisciplinary Mentoring for Professional Identities**

This theme encapsulates the psychology students' experiences of the benefits of mentoring for their future careers as researchers that included self-reflection as researchers in the making, greater confidence in their own research skills and being able to transfer such skills to the planning students. Acting as mentors helped them to enhance their research knowledge as they transferred it to the mentees. They also realized that they took their research skills for granted and that they had something unique to contribute. This in turn made them more confident about their research expertise:

Group 2: I thought it was very helpful. You look at the published literature and become complacent assuming that everyone knows how to do research. When you work with students you notice subtle differences between people who can do research and people who can't. That contributes indirectly to our understanding of research. So I actually learned quite a lot.

### **Discussion**

Interdisciplinary collaboration is a valuable site for mentoring team members as it helps individuals to broaden their networks and to be trained in new techniques (Goring et al., 2014). Our findings revealed that although both groups of students who participated in the mentoring program experienced challenges, the psychology students experienced increased confidence about their research skills and felt that they could make a unique contribution to their mentees' academic outcomes. Overall, the program seems to have offered an experiential learning opportunity for what Vu and Dall'Alba (2011) describe as getting students to learn the practice of their professions as they participate in activities similar to those that they will engage in as professionals. Although our study did not focus on health

service psychology training on a doctoral level, the underlying dynamics that our context revealed may hold some relevance for attaining two of the competencies highlighted by the SoA and Blueprint as discussed in the introduction.

Reid and Petocz (2002) argue that it is critical to understand the connection between students' perception of their profession and what they think is important to learn. Although the psychology students struggled with the interdisciplinary nature of the mentoring relationship (e.g., how psychological theories relate to a perceived urban planning project) they were able to see how it contributed to the development of their personal and professional identities as future researchers. Mentoring students from another discipline may thus promote "interdisciplinary literacy" and encourage "integrative problem-solving" as well as build communication skills, project management skills and teamwork (Kricsfalusy et al., 2016, p. 8). Cacioppo (2007) argues that psychologists are well-placed to lead interdisciplinary teams because of our understanding of group processes and how to enhance their productivity.

Another side of the coin of interdisciplinary collaboration is the possibility that each discipline can be left feeling side-lined, as seen in the responses from our participants. Both the psychology and the planning students experienced their contributions as counting less than they felt it should to the recycling research project. The challenge is for adequate emphasis to be placed on the different disciplines involved (Sutton & Kemp, 2006). It is important for the unique perspectives of all the team members to be shared and discussed (Cacioppo, 2007; Reich & Reich, 2006) as communication assists in developing a collective understanding of an issue (Yocom, Proksch, Born, & Tyman, 2012). The personal characteristics (such as open-mindedness to new ideas, willingness to learn from other disciplines, to invest considerable time in collaboration, to negotiate conflict and differences) of successful interdisciplinary collaborators are important (Gardner et al., 2014; Maton et al.,

2006; Reich & Reich, 2006). Davis et al. (2015) examined the extent to which interdisciplinary research teams exist at George Mason University and found that students are reluctant “to venture too far outside of their disciplinary boundaries to engage a mentor in an altogether different discipline” (p. 435). Perhaps our program did not allow for enough composite interdisciplinarity (see Chettiparamb, 2011) because the different disciplines did not have the same agency in, and respect for, the research process (Reich & Reich, 2006) and some of the students found crossing the considerable disciplinary barriers a challenge.

### **Benefits of interdisciplinary mentoring programs for psychology trainees**

Some benefits of interdisciplinary near-peer research mentoring for psychology trainees can be distilled from the findings of our study. Although we explained that the psychology students were specializing in research in the introductory session of the mentoring program, the planning students still perceived them to be therapists who would have people “stretched out on a couch”(!). Interdisciplinary collaborations may present trainees with the opportunity to clarify their disciplinary context by schooling other disciplines in how broad psychology can be and the unique contributions that we can make, particularly in the area of research. An important element of interdisciplinary collaboration is working on a significant problem (such as the recycling behavior project) together (Maton et al., 2006) which may assist in developing a collective, multiple understanding of a research topic and enhancing psychology trainees’ research skills. Interdisciplinary teaching’s aim is to strengthen teamwork and collaboration between professionals (which enhances how they practice their disciplines), but it also stimulates diverse thinking about a particular issue (Weinberg & Harding, 2004). Although some of the students felt that they did not contribute equally to the recycling behavior research, collaborating in a project with another discipline (including faculty) can also model power sharing with clients for psychology trainees (see,

for example, Toporek & Vaughn (2010) about sharing power in clinical work). Ultimately, the professional recognition that the mentors received and the prospects of wider networking offered extrinsic benefits, while the mentors' reports of "learning a lot" provided intrinsic benefits related to their satisfaction of choice of training program (see Cobb et al., 2017).

### **Limitations**

A shortcoming of using a formal mentoring approach is that the data may account for the participants' experiences of the design of the program rather than of the mentoring relationship. Although both groups of students chose to participate in the program as well as in the research about their experiences of the mentoring, this might not have been an ideal case to study. In line with Adedokun et al. (2013) we also caution that our findings are limited to one group of students on one campus and should thus be interpreted with this in mind. Using focus groups to collect data about students' experiences may have limited the study in two ways. Firstly, even though an independent consultant facilitated the groups and the informed consent indicated that all responses will remain anonymous students may have engaged in a degree of response bias expecting that they might still appear favorable with their peers and lecturers. The extent of negative feedback from both groups of students suggests that this was, however, unlikely. Secondly, the transcripts of the focus groups suggested that some students may have struggled to express themselves in English. Though one of the official languages of instruction at the University, English was the second or even third language for many of the participants at the time of conducting the focus groups. Furthermore, the independent consultant who facilitated the focus groups was not involved in the mentoring program and may not have probed the participants' responses in the same manner as we would have.

## **Conclusion**

An interdisciplinary near-peer mentoring program may be one approach to addressing the increasing need for psychology professionals to acquire interdisciplinary skills (especially during training) and for the profession to secure examples of how science and practice can be integrated. The findings of this study show that students from different disciplines can benefit from guiding and being guided through the research and writing process, despite certain negative experiences and we described some of the benefits that the psychology students experienced as interdisciplinary research mentors.

This study contributes to a small body of literature about interdisciplinary research mentoring, particularly for professional psychology students. Further research is currently being undertaken on the experiences of a different cohort of research psychology and urban planning students of a similar, revised mentoring program that incorporates feedback from this study. This will allow us to compare experiences across the two mentoring programs. Further research could also differentiate between students' experiences of the design of the mentoring program and of the actual mentoring relationship. In addition, interdisciplinary near-peer research mentoring programs need to be investigated internationally to understand more about their potential benefits to students in other training programs or interdisciplinary contexts.

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