What is Campus Corps?
Campus Corps is a powerful campus-based therapeutic mentoring program for at-risk youth, ages 10-18, in Larimer County. Youth are paired in one-on-one mentoring relationships with undergraduate Colorado State University students. The program engages 300 youth and 300 mentors each year. Mentoring occurs in a uniquely structured and intentional multi-level mentoring community. The program is overseen by faculty members in the Marriage and Family Therapy program.

Who are the youth participants?
Youth are experiencing challenges of living in poverty, academic failure, substance abuse, delinquency or involvement in the juvenile court system, mental health issues, or family or social difficulties. Since 2010, over 1100 youth have participated in Campus Corps. Many return for multiple semesters.

How are youth referred to Campus Corps?
Youth from Larimer County are referred to Campus Corps from the juvenile justice system (36%), school counselors and resource officers (22%), and social service agencies (31%). We specifically recruit youth that are at-risk for not reaching their full potential due to poverty, involvement in the court system and academic failure, among other barriers.

Who are the CSU participants?
CSU students from more than 85 majors participate in Campus Corps as mentors. Since 2010, over 1500 students have participated in Campus Corps. Graduate students in the Marriage and Family Therapy program provide therapy to mentees during the program. Doctoral level faculty in the Marriage and Family Therapy program operate and supervise the program.

Goals of Campus Corps
- Promote the resilience and life success of at-risk youth.
- Prepare university students to become highly skilled, civically engaged professionals.
- Respond to community initiatives to strengthen community systems to better serve at-risk youth and their families.

Youth outcomes revised 6 2014

“As the weeks went by and I was staying clean and everything, I was like, I’m not such a bad person, maybe I have more of a purpose in life than just doing drugs.” - Youth Mentee

“I changed a lot because I feel better about myself, I feel great about myself, and I feel like I am happy.” - Youth Mentee
History
Campus Corps was developed in 2009 in response to a community need identified by the juvenile justice system or additional services for first time offending youth. The Corporation for National and Community Service through Learn and Serve provided three years of initial funding to develop and pilot the program. In less than five years, Campus Corps has become a core service for at-risk youth in Northern Colorado and is attracting national and international attention because of the unique and effective model that benefits youth, university students, and the community.

Award Winning Program
Campus Corps has been recognized by multiple awards, including:
- 2013 Outstanding Engagement from the CSU College of Health and Human Sciences
- 2012 Exceptional Innovation in Service-Learning from the CSU Institute for Learning & Teaching
- 2012 Corporation for National & Community Service as a National Service Impact Challenge Finalist.

What makes Campus Corps Unique?
- Campus Corps takes place on a university campus, providing mentees with firsthand experience and a view of higher education as important and attainable.
- Graduate students and experienced mentors serve as mentor coaches, who provide support and guidance to mentors and mentees.
- Faculty members used their expertise in systemic and therapeutic interventions to create this novel, evidence-based program.
- Ongoing research provides feedback for program enhancements to maximize effectiveness, and furthers national mentoring initiatives.
- Parent education, community resource referral, emergency intervention, and therapy services surround mentees and their families in support.
- Campus Corps has the structure and therapeutic staff to address mentees’ mental health and behavior issues that are beyond the scope of traditional mentorship programs.
- Mentor-mentee pairs are organized into small groups called mentor families. Mentor families are an integral part of the larger mentoring community each evening at Campus Corps. See diagram below.

“I loved having a chance to get close with my Mentor Family every week. We had inside jokes, played games, and were always there to support one another.”
- CSU Student Mentor

Program Overview
A series of hierarchical regression models were utilized to assess the effects of Campus Corps on undergraduate participants. After controlling for age, gender, minority status, primary major and pre-intervention levels of volunteerism, as well as pre-intervention levels of all outcome variables, results revealed positive outcomes for college student mentors in comparison to college students who did not participate in Campus Corps.

In brief, participation in Campus Corps accounted for significant changes regarding the following:

- Community Service Self-Efficacy (student’s confidence in performing community service)
- Service Learning Benefit (student’s perceptions of service learning experience including practical and interpersonal skills gained, citizenship, and personal responsibility)
- Self-Esteem (student’s feelings and beliefs about self)
- Civic Attitudes (student’s attitudes related to community service and attitudes toward the responsibility to help others and solve societal problems)
- Political Awareness (student’s awareness of local and national events and political issues)
- Civic Action (student’s intentions to become involved in future community service or action)
- Interpersonal Social Skills (student’s perception of their ability to listen, problem solve, work cooperatively, communicate, make friends, and think critically)

The program evaluation also included a qualitative analysis of mentor’s perceptions of the influence that participating in Campus Corps had on them. Nineteen focus groups, involving 141 students, revealed that Campus Corps resulted in students’ experiencing significant personal growth, notable professional development, and valuable civic attitudes and engagement.

Mentor participation in the program is associated with 63% lower odds of dropping out of CSU in any given year.

“I was ready to drop out of college before joining Campus Corps and now, because of my time spent with the youth, I am excited about the possibility of pursuing an education degree.”

-CSU Student Mentor

Engaging and effective schedule

3:00-4:00 pm  Pre-lab (Mentors only)
4:00-4:30 pm  Walk and Talk
4:30-5:30 pm  Supporting School Success
5:30-6:00 pm  Family-style Meal
6:00-7:00 pm  Pro-social Activity 1
7:00-8:00 pm  Pro-social Activity 2
8:00-9:00 pm  Post-lab (Mentors only)

Results of Program Evaluation

Student Mentors

“I gained a whole family and a place to belong at Colorado State.”

– CSU Student-Mentor

“I was ready to drop out of college before joining Campus Corps and now, because of my time spent with the youth, I am excited about the possibility of pursuing an education degree.”

-CSU Student Mentor
Results of Program Evaluation

Youth Mentees

Results of our research indicate that youth mentees report:

- More regular school attendance
- Reduced alcohol and marijuana use
- Fewer problem behaviors
- Improved attitudes about substance use and problem behaviors
- Enhanced emotional well-being

“Before, I hung out with people who were smoking pot and stuff. Coming here made me realize I didn’t want to hang around people like that.”

- Youth Mentee

A series of linear regression models were utilized to assess the effects of Campus Corps on 249 youth participants, as compared to a control group. After controlling for age, gender, presence of behavioral or mental health problems, and pre-intervention levels of the outcome variable, results revealed positive outcomes for Campus Corps youth, including:

- Improved school attendance
- Decreased frequency of substance use
- Decreased frequency of problem behavior
- Improved attitudes about substance use and problem behavior
- Improved psychological wellbeing

“Being at Campus Corps, I got to see how much fun I can have sober.”

- Youth Mentee

Qualitative analysis of 87 individual interviews examining youth’s perceptions of Campus Corps effectiveness revealed:

- 87% indicated that Campus Corps had helped them with some aspect of school improvement, such as increasing attendance, improving grades, or improving understanding of schoolwork.
- 72% stated Campus Corps had positively affected their relationships with others, including peers, family members, and teachers.
- 54% reported improvements in feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem.
- 75% expressed improved attitudes about future plans regarding school and career.
- 76% felt they had gained positive influence from mentorship in the area of delinquency.

“When my grades were low, I was kind of like, ‘Whatever. I’m not going to pass; why should I even bother?’ But you know, after my mentor helped me get my grades up, I was like ‘Okay, I can do this.”

- Youth Mentee

“After being to the different places [on campus] and learning more about them, it showed me that college is a little bit more helpful than I thought it would be.”

- Youth Mentee

The fragility of youth-adult mentoring relationships requires innovative program components to support and sustain these relationships and enhance participant outcomes. The current study presents and explores the experience of a unique mentoring program component known as Mentor Families, in which three to four pairs of mentors and mentees engage in structured activities together. Grounded theory methods were utilized to explore the experiences of mentors \( n = 212 \) and mentees \( n = 87 \) involved in Mentor Families within a mentoring program for adolescents at risk for delinquency. Findings from the current study reveal that Mentor Families provides a place (a) for mentors to receive support and supervision, (b) for mentors and mentees to belong, and (c) for mentees to grow and learn. These findings suggest that Mentor Families warrants further investigation as to how they may positively affect mentoring relationships and programs.


College student mentors are increasingly mentoring at-risk youth, yet little is known about the benefits that college students derive from their experience mentoring within the context of a service-learning course. This qualitative study used focus groups to examine college students’ experiences as participants in a unique program, Campus Corps: Therapeutic Mentoring of At-Risk Youth. This course-based, service-learning program utilizes college student mentors to mentor at-risk youth within a family systems framework. In 19 focus groups conducted with 141 college student participants, the student mentors indicated that they experienced significant personal growth and professional development through their participation in the program and that the program positively influenced their civic attitudes and their orientation toward civic engagement. This article provides a review of related research, describes the program, explores the findings of the focus groups, and discusses implications for college service-learning programs.


To date, little is understood about the mentors’ experience of mentoring at-risk youth. The current study sought to enrich this understanding by exploring how mentors within a structured mentoring community perceive their experience and determining what strategies they employ to optimally navigate their mentoring relationship. Due to the need to cultivate a deeper understanding, the present study utilized grounded theory methodology to uncover common themes within the experience. Data from focus group transcripts and written reflections of 123 mentors resulted in a comprehensive model of mentor experiences, including a largely positive experience in which mentors hold perceptions of themselves, their mentee, the mentoring relationship, and the mentoring program – Campus Corps: Therapeutic Mentoring for At-Risk Youth. Mentors described a series of strategies utilized during the experience and described potential outcomes of mentoring youth. Results hold important implications for mentors and programs struggling to recruit, support, or sustain mentors.
Service learning is increasingly being used as a pedagogical strategy for promoting the development of civic-mindedness among university students. Despite the use of this strategy, little is known about the benefits derived from specific types of service-learning experiences. Additionally, few notable studies have examined the unique outcomes experienced by mentors of at-risk youth. Therefore, this study examines the civic-related benefits that college students derive from mentoring at-risk youth within a structured, service-learning course. A series of linear regression models were estimated to determine if there were significant post-intervention differences between the treatment and comparison condition for the variables of interest, after adjusting for key background factors and pre-intervention levels of all variables. The results indicated that, in comparison to college students who did not participate in the course (n = 258), college student in Campus Corps, a youth mentoring program, (n = 390) had significantly higher scores at post-intervention regarding mentors’ civic attitudes, community service self-efficacy, self-esteem, interpersonal and problem solving skills, political awareness, and civic action. Findings hold important implications for youth mentoring programs and future research.