

April 18, 2021

The Margaret Boyd Scholars Program as a Mentoring Community

*Prepared by Peter Mather and Oumarou Abdoulaye Balarabe for Kathy Fahl,
Director of the Boyd Scholars Program, Ohio University*

Survey

The survey was developed based on Sharon Parks' theory (2011) that mentoring can occur in a classroom or student leadership group or organization environments. Parks' conception of mentoring refers to activities and experiences that lead to personal development and transformation, commitment to one's community and world, and a life of meaning and purpose. According to Parks, the mentoring environment for young adults should have the following four features: *A Network of Belonging*, *Big-Enough Questions*, *Encounters with Otherness*, and *Vital Habits of Mind*.

- **A Network of Belonging** refers to a trustworthy place where the young adult can try and fail or succeed while experiencing mattering, connection, inspiration, support and challenge.
- **Big-Enough Questions** refers to an environment where an attitude of inquiry with respect to questions of meaning, purpose, and faith are welcome and pursued with vigor, support, and inspiration.
- **Encounters with Otherness** has to be with young adults' experiences with those "outside their own tribe."
- **Vital Habits of Mind** refers to habits that invite genuine dialogue, strengthen critical thought, encourage connective-holistic awareness, and develop the contemplative mind.

The purpose of the survey was to examine how Parks' mentoring environment community and features are being realized in the Boyd Scholar's environment. The survey includes both numeric rating and opportunities for participants to explain their responses through open-ended questions. In quantitative questions, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which statements related to Parks' four features of a mentoring environment are true of their experience in the **Boyd Scholars** community on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; and 5 = Strongly Agree). The word "community" refers to the "**Boyd Scholars** community" throughout the survey.

The following include statistical summaries of each subscale and responses to the open-ended questions.

A Network of Belonging

For this subscale, **Mean = 4.30; 95% CI for Mean (4.07, 4.52); SD = .51; N = 33**. On average, a mean of 4.30 indicates that scholars generally experience a positive sense of belonging and community within the Boyd Scholars program.

Open-ended question 1: What is the most important aspect of your experience in this community that has helped you feel like you belong?

April 18, 2021

- Cohort meetings
- Having a mentor from the cohort
- Opportunities to gather, be together and share personal experiences
- Connecting with other scholars from different majors and faculty and other women outside of the scholar's program
- Freshman year retreat and seminar
- Conducive space where scholars feel safe, heard, seen and supported
- Friendships within the scholar's community that offer support and celebrate each other
- Supportive faculty

Open-ended question 2: In what way or ways do you contribute to this community?

- Participating in projects or events e.g., meetings, discussions, projects, workshops
- By being honest & encouraging other scholars to participate
- Through leadership e.g., cohort representative
- Through friendship
- Always sharing your perspective in different discussions

Big-Enough Questions

For this subscale, **Mean = 4.17; 95% CI for Mean (3.91, 4.43); SD = .58; N = 33.** On average, participants' responses suggest that the Boyd Scholars program provides an environment where an attitude of inquiry with respect to questions of meaning, purpose, and faith are welcome and pursued with vigor, support, and inspiration.

Open-ended question 1: In this community, I have been inspired by _____; Please explain in the box below!

Open-ended question 2: Something I can now imagine for the future that has resulted from my experience in this community is _____; Please explain in the box below!

- **Inspiration:**
 - Supportiveness from other Boyd Scholars [unapologetically living their lives, high sense of community]
 - Strength of women – past members, faculty board – hearing personal stories
 - Personal stories, scholars achieving amazing goals
- **Goals for the future that has resulted from Boyd experience**
 - Establishing a Support network/ group that is trusting, loving, lasting
 - Confidence / less fearful about pursuing aspirations
 - A career that aligns with passion
 - Working with women
 - Becoming more assertive / feeling secured
 - Advocacy for women's rights & gender inequalities/ Inclusive / empathetic
 - Taking on a leadership role – making a positive change

April 18, 2021

Encounter with Otherness

For this subscale, **Mean = 4.25; 95% CI for Mean (4.06, 4.44); SD = .43; N = 33**. With a mean of 4.25, it can be deduced that participants seem to agree that the Boyd Scholars program constitutes an environment where scholars on average tend to value and appreciate differences through their interaction and connection with people who are culturally and racially from diverse backgrounds.

Open-ended question 1: Describe a situation in which you learned something important from someone in this community.

Open-ended question 2: A challenging experience I've had in this community is _____; Please explain in the box below!

- Greater awareness of different groups and discussing intersectional identities primarily - race and gender
- The program helps scholars establish strong connections primarily during the 1st year retreat, making friends which aided in developing a sense of belonging
- Awareness of the importance of the women's rights movement and the challenges of being from an underrepresented group in academia
- The program demonstrates and values group discussions (which are often challenging to do on their own) that allow for the sharing of diverse viewpoints and lived experiences
- Provides room for scholars to be themselves, challenge their own beliefs (world view) and acknowledge their biases and privilege

Feedback and Recommendations, scholars shared during the session:

- Feeling welcomed and supported, recognition of queer identities and diverse experiences/realities
- Helps to push the boundaries, feel empowered to ask critical questions
- Need for more intersectional dialogue and staff or seminar instructors who are POC, not very representative
- Being able to debrief activities and to be open about how certain activities reinforce or remind scholars of unfavorable experiences and stereotypes. Reliving it and not having that be relatable to many other persons in the group. Knowing how to unpack that and to have someone with the awareness to have that difficult conversation is needed.

Vital Habits of Mind

For this subscale, **Mean = 4.33; 95% CI for Mean (4.15, 4.52); SD = .41; N = 33**. On average, the survey respondents seem to agree that the Boyd Scholar program presents them with

April 18, 2021

opportunities for reflection, avenues for dialogue, and critical practices. The lowest mean score is 4.15 and the highest score is 4.52.

Open-ended question 1: Describe an insight you have gained from participating in this community.

- Opportunities to learn about and understand issues that affect others: privilege, discrimination, and racism.
- Everyone has the ability to achieve: We are all gifted with a talent regardless of our backgrounds.
- Opportunities to appreciate and embrace diversity of perspectives: Different ways of seeing, doing, and understanding.
- Failure or trying something different is not weakness; and
- Self-reflection as a tool for personal growth.

Using Results

- **Formative:** The positive results of this survey point to what **is** working within the Margaret Boyd Scholars program. We encourage program leaders to leverage what is already working within the environment in order to ensure to maximize these opportunities as the program continues to support the development of young adults. The mentoring community model and survey results can be used to clarify the goals of the program and for ongoing conversation with members of the community and with the leadership team in order to enhance program efficacy.
- **Summative:** The results of this instrument can be used to validate the benefits of the community through both quantitative and qualitative evidence. The positive results can be leveraged for supporting ongoing institutional and other forms of support.

*Notes:

- This survey was conducted during the Fall 2021 semester, during the global COVID-19 pandemic.
- A focus group was conducted following the completion of the survey. The recording of the focus group was inadvertently deleted. However, notes from the focus group discussion on the *Encounters with Otherness* subscale were recovered and included in notes above.

April 18, 2021

References

Parks, S. D. (2011). S. D. J. Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith. Jossey-Bass.