

Increasing the Number of Participants in ACSA's Mentorship Program

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Abstract

Mentoring relationships are vitally important to all working professionals and is especially beneficial to college-age students who are about to enter the workforce. Mentoring offers high-level guidance for long-term improvement in targeted areas for mentees, and an opportunity for mentors to become better community leaders. Although this type of relationship is equally beneficial to both the mentor and the mentee, many students enrolled in cooperative programs and other internships are unaware that these opportunities exist.

The UBC Arts Co-op Student Association (ACSA) has facilitated a targeted mentorship program in order to meet the needs of students enrolled in the Arts Cooperative Program for a number of years. Increasing the participation rates of programs that focus on fostering a mentoring culture should be a top priority moving into the new year.

Anyone in an executive position at an organization that offers a mentoring program should consider the following in order to increase participation rates in networking programs:

- Requesting feedback from mentors/mentees participating in the mentoring program in order to create targeted messaging;
- Developing an effective online marketing strategy that promotes the benefits of the mentorship program and is successful in its goal to attract new participants

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Introduction

Definition

Merriam-Webster traditionally defines mentorship as, “the influence, guidance, or direction given by a mentor.” In recent years the term ‘mentoring relationship’ has taken on a slightly different meaning that emphasizes the mentor helping the mentee to grow as an individual by assisting them in accomplishing goals. This helps to create the next generation of professionals in a specific field that come into the profession with more confidence and conviction (Scandura, 2012, p. 171). With the rise in online networking opportunities, mentoring relationships have increased in popularity and have benefitted thousands of college-age students both in Canada and around the world.

Background

The Arts Co-op Student Association (ACSA) represents the student body responsible for bringing together Arts Co-op students, alumni and staff in order to enhance the cooperative education experience. ACSA offers its members the opportunity to network with established professionals, attend résumé building workshops and participate in mock job interviews. A fundamental component of ACSA is the mentorship program which aims to facilitate professional relationships between students and those already in the workforce.

Established in 1999, ACSA has seen an increase in the number of participants in the mentorship program with the exception of the last three years. The 2019/2020 cohort saw a total of forty participants (twenty mentors and twenty mentees) take part in the program; this represents a 50% decrease from the year prior which saw a total of eighty participants (forty

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mentors and forty mentees). The lack of social media promotion for the program has contributed to the decline and will be addressed further as part of this report (Hussain, 2019).

Statement of Problem

If current trends continue and the mentorship program finds that it cannot sustain itself, it will be difficult for ACSA to meet its objective for providing students an opportunity to network and learn from established professionals. There are three major implications of this problem. Firstly, ACSA may see a reduction in membership rates across the board if the mentorship program is no longer being offered. Secondly, it will be more difficult for ACSA to request funding from AMS and the Arts Co-op Office in order to support the club, as the Co-op Office sponsors many events relating to the ACSA Mentorship Program (Hussain, 2019). Thirdly, students and professionals that wish to be part of a mentoring relationship will be denied the invaluable experience to do so.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this report is to determine the number of current participants in the mentorship program in comparison to previous years and analyze why participation rates in the program have been steadily declining. The goal is to identify factors that compel ACSA students to join the mentorship program and then develop a strategic marketing plan for promoting the mentorship program to a wider audience. These findings and strategies will be shared with ACSA executives in the hopes that mentorship program continues to grow and benefit Arts Co-op Students.

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Scope

To assess the feasibility of developing a strategic marketing plan for promoting the mentorship program with the aim of recruiting more participants, the intention is to pursue the following five areas of interest in this report:

1. Current participants in the mentorship program for the 2020/2021 cohort in comparison to previous years.
2. Social media platforms used for networking and professional development opportunities by UBC Arts Co-op Students.
3. Thoughts about the purpose of mentoring relationships. Ways this can be marketed based on social media trends.
4. Feedback from previous mentees/mentors about the structure of the program.
5. Costs associated with an online marketing campaign designed.

Methods

This report employs the use of online surveys with past and current ACSA executives as one source of primary data. Additionally, online surveys were directed to a number of former mentors/mentees in the UBC ACSA Mentorship Program that would help to shed light on challenges to recruitment that may not be visible to someone outside of the program. The general student body also engaged with an online survey that aimed to determine how much of a profile the mentorship program has, thereby helping to determine the feasibility of a strategic online marketing recruitment plan.

Secondary sources discussed in this report are publications about the effectiveness of online marketing strategies in recruitment for student-led activities. Past transition reports

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created by former ACSA executives leading the mentorship program were also consulted which highlighted the declining participation rates (Hussain, 2019).

Data Section

Three online survey packages were distributed to three different groups. The first set of questions was emailed out to thirty-five ACSA executives who served in a senior position in last five years. In total, twenty ACSA executives submitted responses to the questions that were posed. The second set of questions was sent out to 118 past mentors and mentees that were a part of the ACSA Mentorship Program in the last three years, and of that group there were ninety-three responses that were received before the deadline. Finally, the last set of questions was directed at the larger Arts Co-op student body through a survey link posted on Facebook. A total of fifteen individuals completed that particular survey. Each online survey package contained five questions.

The purpose of these surveys was to obtain primary data for an analysis aimed at providing recommendations for increasing the number of participants in the UBC Arts Co-op Student Association (ACSA) Mentorship Program. The data gathered from these questions determined whether an online marketing strategy could combat the low participation rate found in the program and will be further discussed in the recommendations section of this report.

Survey Analysis

Before the possibility of increasing the number of participants in the ACSA Mentorship Program can be entertained, an assessment of current and past participation rates needs to be

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made first. This will determine how the participation rates have changed over the last few years and how this will possibly be an indication of future trends.

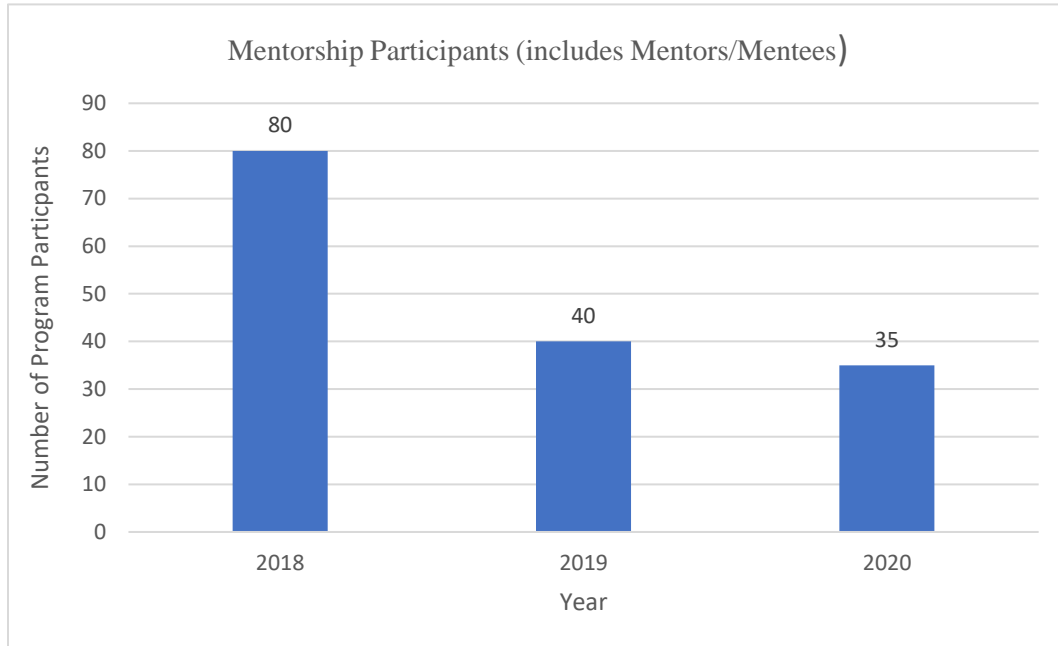


Figure 1: Participation Rates

As indicated in Figure 1, participation rates in ACSA's Mentorship Program have been steadily declining over the last three years. In 2018, the Mentorship Program had a total of eighty participants with an even split of mentors and mentees. The very next year, that number was cut in half, signifying a 50% decrease from the year prior. As of this year, ACSA only has thirty-five participants in the program with an even split of mentors and mentees. Thus, Figure 1 indicates a steady decline of participation rates in ACSA's Mentorship Program.

The first question in the online survey directed toward ACSA executives paints a picture of how ACSA is promoting the mentorship program. Survey respondents were asked to rate their opinion of ACSA's ability to promote the program on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing

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'Poor,' and 5 representing 'Very good.' Survey respondents could also choose option 3 which was 'Neutral.' The results of the survey question are outlined below.

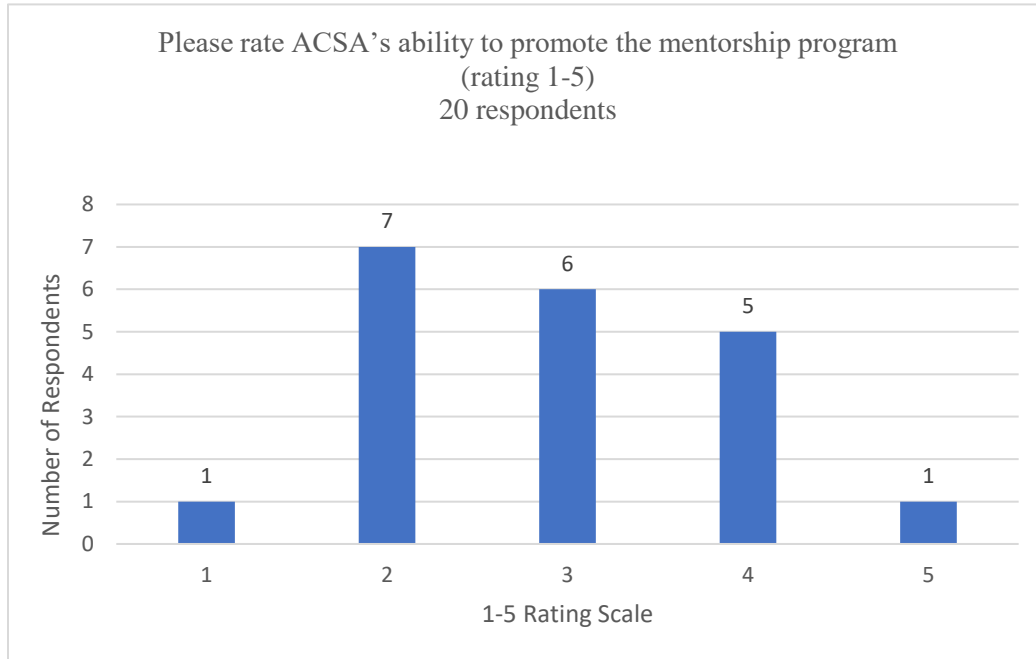


Figure 2: ACSA Executive Survey Question 1

Figure 1 shows the distribution of answers from among twenty former and current ACSA executives. Generally, most respondents did not feel strongly about ACSA's ability to promote the program to students and only 10% of survey respondents indicated that ACSA promoted the program either 'Very well' or 'Very poorly.' However, 35% of ACSA executives indicated that the program was promoted 'Poorly' or felt 'Neutral' (30%) toward the question. This indicates that in the eyes of some of the former and current ACSA executives there is room for growth.

Another question that was posed to ACSA executives was about ways that ACSA could better promote the program for maximum outreach. The question was formatted as a short answer response, and all twenty of the survey respondents filled out this section. The answers

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were organized into four main categories: social media promotion, community outreach, emails, and word of mouth.

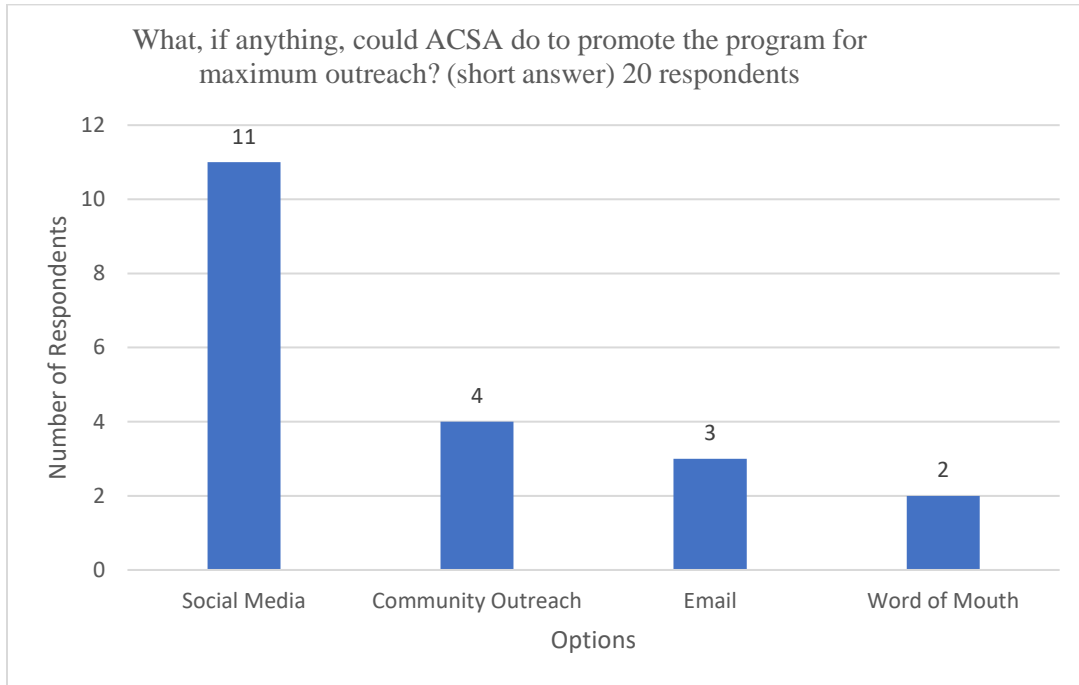


Figure 3: ACSA Executive Survey Question 2

As indicated in this survey question, more than half (55%) of respondents believed that social media is that way to go in terms of maximum outreach for the ACSA Mentorship Program. A total of nine respondents (45%) indicated that maximum outreach could be achieved through another means such as: community outreach, emails, or word of mouth promotion. This shows that most ACSA executives are looking at social media as key way to promote the mentorship program.

The second set of online survey questions were sent to a sizeable number of past mentors and mentees in order to learn more about the mentorship program from former participants. In

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the first question as part of this survey, mentors and mentees from previous years were asked how they heard about the UBC ACSA Mentorship Program. The options included: social media channels (specifically Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), word of mouth (through other students, UBC staff, etc.), the ACSA website, UBC Arts Co-op Office (via emails, social media), and other (respondents were asked to specify).

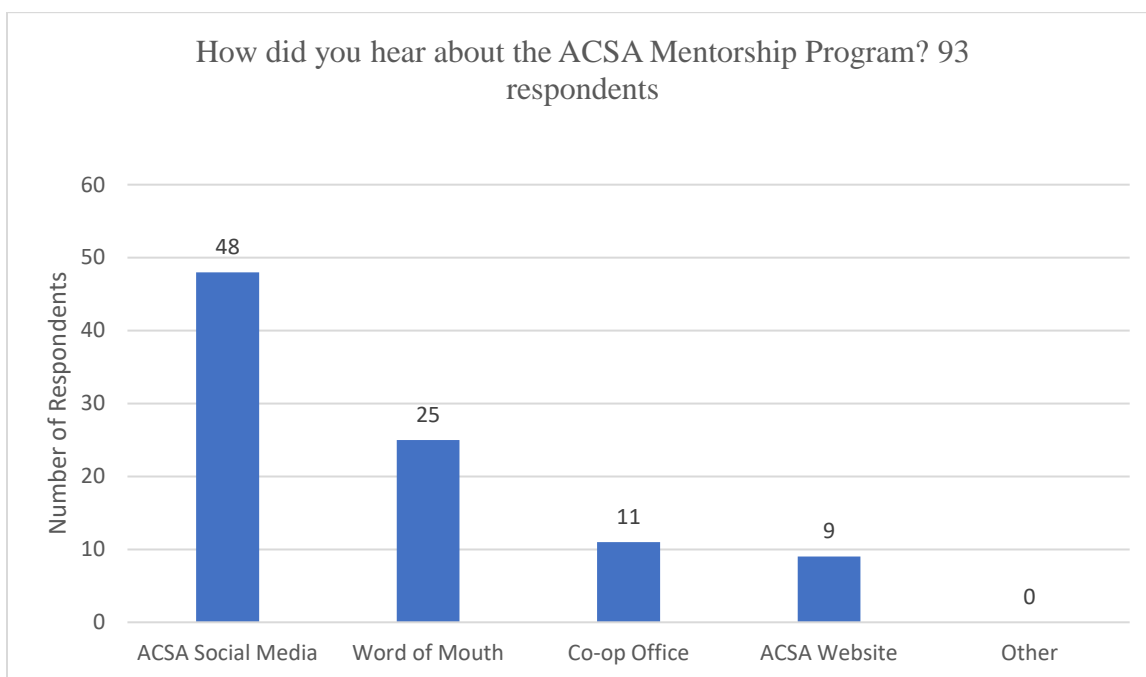


Figure 4: Survey for Former Mentors/Mentees Question 1

The survey results as outlined in Figure 4, indicated that forty-eight or (52%) of survey participants in the mentorship program learned about the program through social media controlled by ACSA. The next most popular choice was ‘Word of Mouth,’ with twenty-five (27%) of respondents indicating they heard about the program from someone else. It would appear that the ACSA website is the least effective way of educating students about the benefits of the Mentorship Program, as only (7%) of the ninety-three students surveyed had learned about the program through the website.

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Another survey question that was aimed at former mentors and mentees in the ACSA Mentorship Program looked at ways that the program stood out to participants. The short answer questions recorded by survey participants were summarized based on four main themes. This included the flexibility of the mentorship program, support provided by ACSA, opportunities to attend ACSA events with mentor/mentee, and cost of the program (free for mentors and students in the Arts Co-op Program).

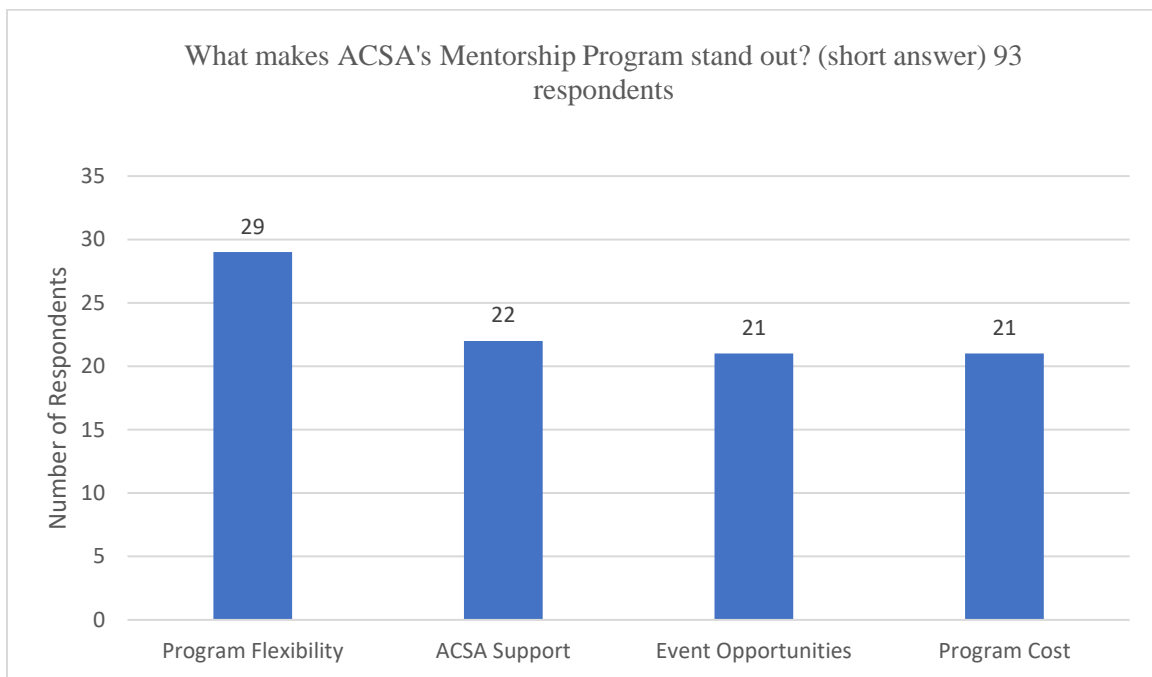


Figure 5: Survey for Former Mentors/Mentees Question 5

When surveyed about what makes the UBC ACSA Mentorship Program special, former mentors and mentees provided a series of short answer responses. A total of twenty-nine people or 31% of those that were asked this question cited the program's flexibility and relaxed structure as its defining feature. Furthermore, survey respondents (23%) also indicated that the support ACSA provides to mentors and mentees was also invaluable. As shown in Figure 5, the

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opportunity to attend events and the affordability of the program were also general themes referenced by survey respondents. This can give ACSA a good sense of what past participants enjoyed most about the program.

The last set of questions were posted to a Facebook discussion board for both current and former UBC Arts Co-op students. The purpose of the final set of interview questions directed at the broader co-op community was aimed at getting a better sense of what students thought about ACSA's Mentorship Program.

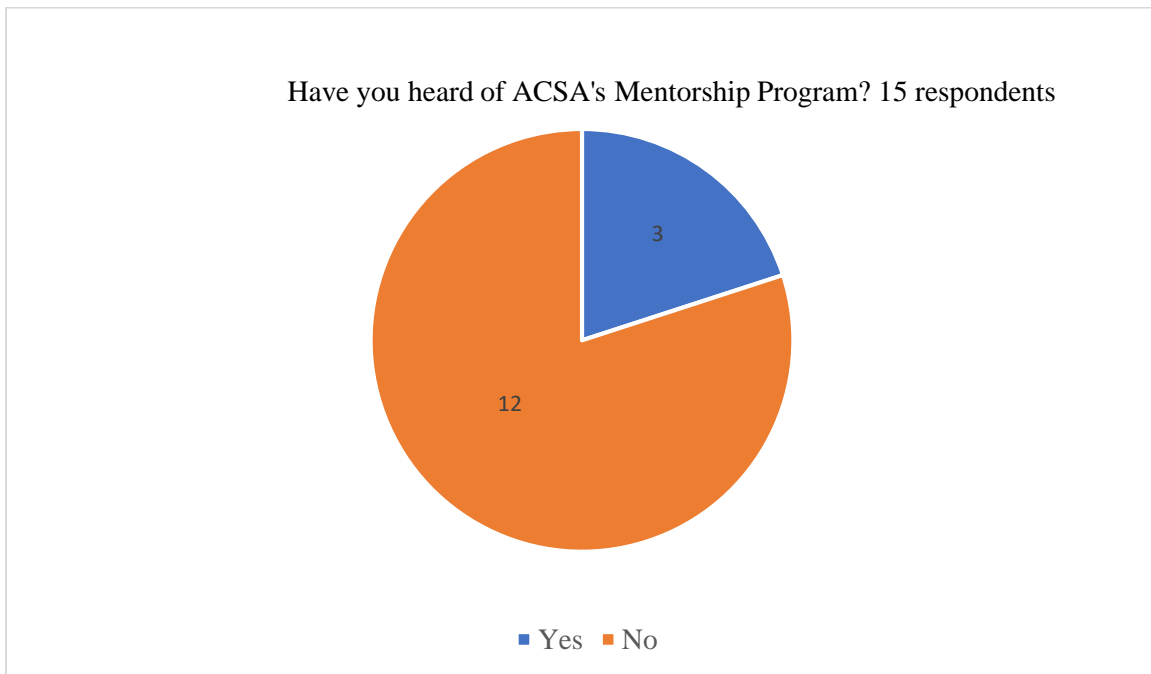


Figure 6: Arts Co-op Community Survey Question 1

The survey questions posed to the general UBC Arts Co-op student community via Facebook were completely voluntary and no incentives were offered. The Facebook group has more than 380 members and fifteen individuals responded to the survey. Figure 6 showcases that

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a majority of those who completed the survey (80%) did not know about ACSA's Mentorship Program whereas 20% of those surveyed did. This draws attention to the fact that there may be a greater opportunity to appeal to co-op student audiences through Facebook subgroups. This will also be discussed later in the recommendations portion of the report.

Another question that was posed to this group looked at social media trends and attitudes among Arts students that were looking to network or participate in a mentoring relationship either as a mentor or a mentee. The students were presented with the following options for the best social media platform in order to find professional development opportunities: Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and other (were asked to specify if this option was selected).

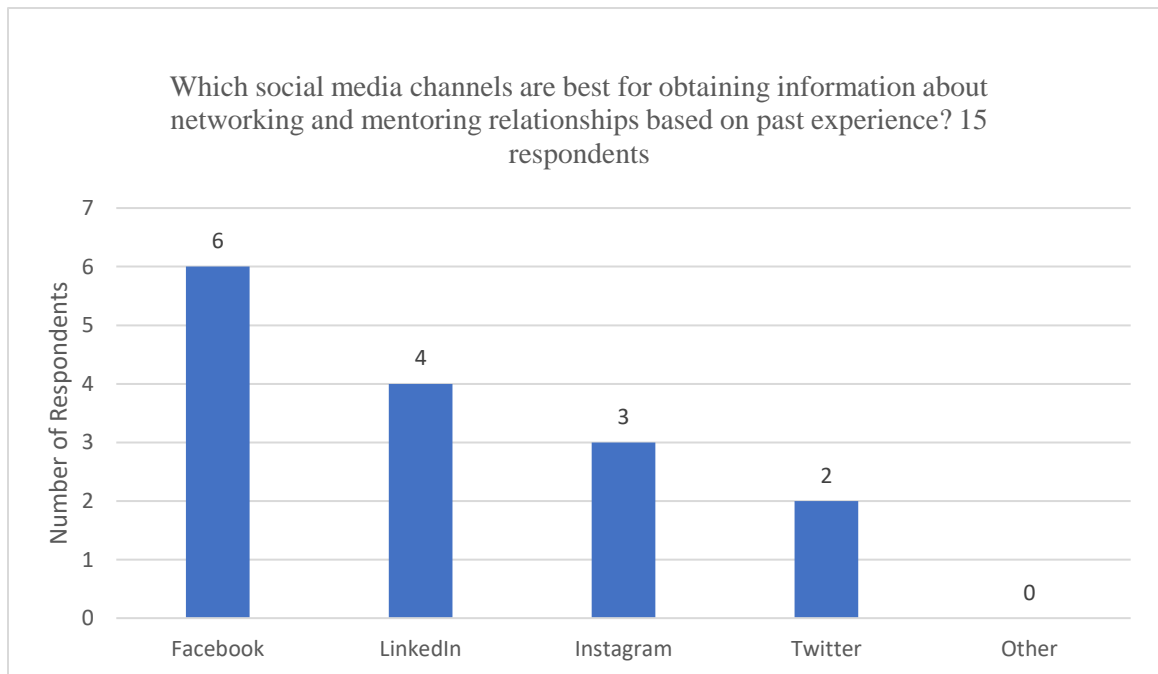


Figure 7: Arts Co-op Community Survey Question 3

Figure 7 shows that 40% of people surveyed indicated that Facebook was the best social media platform for learning about professional development opportunities such as mentoring

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programs. About 27% of survey participants said that LinkedIn was the best option for networking and staying informed about professional opportunities. Instagram (20%) and Twitter (13%) ranked the lowest and appeared to not be a top choice amongst UBC Arts Co-op students who were using social media for professional development purposes.

Conclusion

Limitations

There are some notable limitations to this report that should be addressed. First and foremost, not all aspects of the survey responses have been included in this report for the purpose of outlining relevant findings in the most concise way possible. Secondly, social media statistics (followers, page likes, etc.) with regard to ACSA's social media accounts may explain a decline in participation rates, although this is unlikely (Hussain, 2019). Thirdly, the impact of COVID-19 has not been taken into consideration with regard to participation rates for this year due to a lack of data that could speak to this factor.

Summary of Findings

In analyzing past ACSA Mentorship Chair transition reports and looking at the data from the 2020 cohort, it is clear that participation rates for ACSA's Mentorship Program have been steadily declining. Last year's transition report noted the declining rates and hypothesized that it may be due to a lack of social media promotion in recent years. Former and current ACSA executives that provided responses to an online survey indicated that there was room for improvement and that greater interaction between ACSA and their social media followers is a part of rectifying the problem.

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In addition, former mentors and mentees indicated that they learned about the program through social media. Based on the survey results, past participants in the ACSA Mentorship Program characterize the program's flexibility (ability to define the mentoring relationship and arrange meetings that accommodate both individuals), support from ACSA (the student-led club regularly checks in with pairs to ensure that the partnership is going well), event opportunities (ACSA hosts professional development workshops which mentoring pairs are encouraged to attend) and the program's affordability (free for Arts Co-op students) among the programs best features.

A number of students that are active on Facebook and are a part of the UBC Arts Co-op Program, do not know about ACSA's Mentorship Program. Those that are using social media to network and learn about professional development opportunities, Facebook and LinkedIn are the most frequently used platforms to achieve this. That being said, the remainder of the report focuses on suggestions that aim to help increase the overall participation rate for ACSA's Mentorship Program.

Recommendations

The goal of any organization whether big or small is to continue growing and providing good-quality service. Supported by the primary data in the form of online surveys, a reasonable conclusion could be made that ACSA would benefit from increasing the number of promotional materials shared on social media in order to reinvigorate interest in its Mentorship Program. Since a majority of past participants learned about the program through social media, this is a good place to start. Specifically, Facebook and LinkedIn would be a good place to reach UBC Arts Co-op students that are looking for mentoring programs.

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The club may not have money to implement a professional marketing company in order to implement a strategic online marketing, so a suggestion would be to dedicate a role within ACSA particularly for this purpose and hire a student that has specific experience in marketing, communications and social media management to do this. Last year's transition report indicated that there was no dedicated executive team member that was devoted specifically to promoting ACSA on social media. That was not the case prior to 2018 and may help to explain part of the reason that participation rates have declined (Hussain, 2019).

Expected Results of Recommendations

ACSA should focus on hiring a student executive to monitor the club's social media accounts and look into creating promotional materials geared at promoting the best features of the Mentorship Program. In addition there also needs to be a focus on:

- Requesting feedback from mentors/mentees participating in the mentoring program in order to create targeted messaging;
- Developing an effective online marketing strategy that promotes the benefits of the mentorship program and is successful in its goal to attract new participants

In creating a specific online marketing strategy to target potential mentors and mentees and following social media trends among UBC co-op students, ACSA should see an increase in participation rates in the Mentorship Program in years to come. The recommendations outlined in this report provide a good starting point for investigating the matter further and for exploring ways to reverse current trends.

Appendix A: Online Survey Questions

“I am an undergraduate student at UBC who is engaged in a technical writing project. The purpose of this interview is to obtain primary data for an analysis and investigation that aims to provide recommendations for increasing the number of participants in the UBC Arts Co-op Student Association (ACSA) Mentorship Program. The final formal report will be addressed to the current ACSA executive team. The data gathered from this survey will determine whether an online marketing strategy can combat the low participation rate found in the program. The interview contains 5 questions, and it should take about 20 minutes of your time. Your responses are voluntary and anonymous. Thank you, I appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey.”

Survey Questions for ACSA executives

1. Please rate ACSA's ability to promote the mentorship program (rating 1-5)
2. What, if anything, could ACSA do to promote the program for maximum outreach? (short answer)
3. What type of posts, etc. on ACSA's social media channels receive the most engagement (e.g. likes, comments)?
 1. Videos
 2. Events
 3. Shared articles
 4. Call-to-action posts
 5. Other (describe)
4. How many mentors/mentees have signed up for this year's mentorship program as compared to last year? (short answer)
5. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, what is ACSA's approach to this year's mentorship program? Promotion of the program? (short answer)

Survey for past mentors/mentees

1. How did you hear about the ACSA Mentorship Program?
 1. ACSA website/social media channels (specify which one)
 2. Word of mouth
 3. UBC Arts Co-op Office
 4. Other (Specify)
2. Briefly describe what a mentorship relationship means to you (short answer).
3. What are the three most important takeaways from being part of a mentoring relationship? (short answer)
4. What did ACSA do well in terms of the mentorship program? What could be improved upon? (short answer)
5. What makes the ACSA Mentorship Program stand out? (short answer)

Survey for general arts co-op student body

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1. Have you ever heard of the UBC ACSA Mentorship Program? (Y/N)
2. (Brief commentary about the program). Based on the information provided, what aspects of the program would be most appealing to students?
3. Which social media channels are best for obtaining information about networking and mentoring relationships based on past experience?
 1. Facebook
 2. LinkedIn
 3. Instagram
 4. Twitter
 5. Other (specify)
4. What kind of posts are the easiest to engage with on social media?
 1. Photos
 2. Shared articles
 3. Videos
 4. Other (specify)
5. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'mentoring relationship'?

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