

Reciprocal Benefits of Near-Peer Mentoring & Community-Based Environmental Action



1) Setting the Stage:

Diversity Pathway Programs, Near-Peer Mentoring
& Culturally-Relevant Approaches

2) Program Model:

Mentors Make All the Difference

3) Research:

Impacts on Self-Efficacy, Interests & Career Goals

4) Results:

Reciprocal Impacts on Mentors & Teens
Reinforced with Culturally-Relevant Approaches





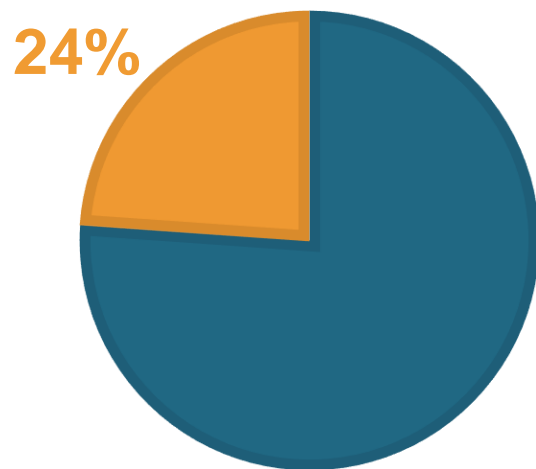
Setting the Stage



Lack of Representation within Environmental Fields

Representation of Students of Color with Conferred Environmental Bachelor's Degree

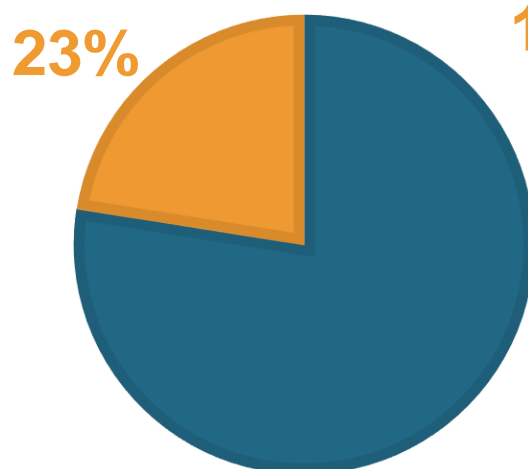
■ White Students ■ Students of Color



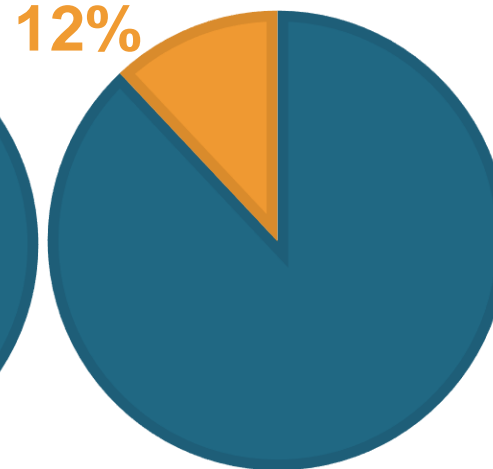
STUDENTS

Representation Professionals of Color within Environmental Organizations

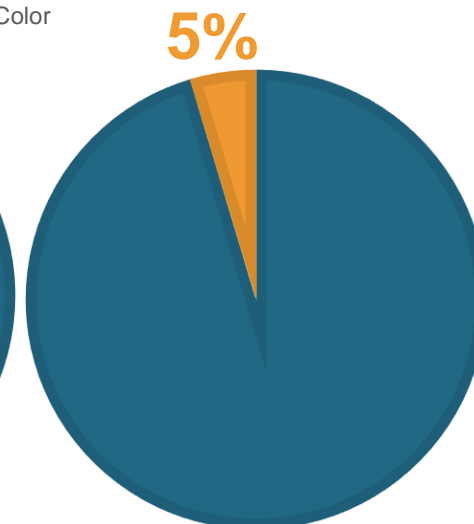
■ White Professionals ■ Professionals of Color



INTERNS



STAFF



BOARD MEMBERS

Inequities within the Education System

- **Educational opportunity and quality disparities** between white students and students of color well known nationwide
(de Brey et al. Status & Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018)

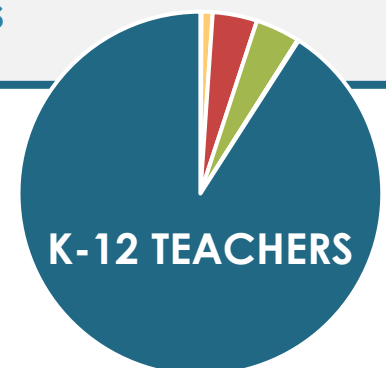
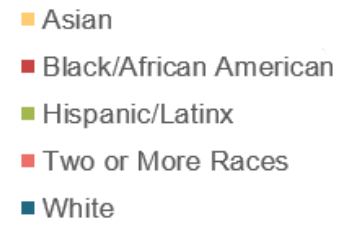
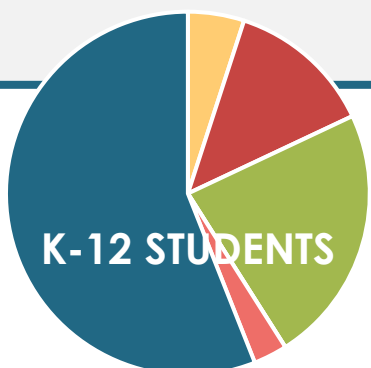
- **This looks like:**

- **Funding gaps**
- **Lack of representation** among teaching staff and mentors
- **Lack of challenging curriculum** that is relevant to and sustains students' lived experiences



“Connecticut has a \$639 million funding gap between districts serving majority white student populations and all other school districts.” ~ED of School and State Finance Project

Racial & Ethnic Composition of Students & Teachers in Connecticut Schools



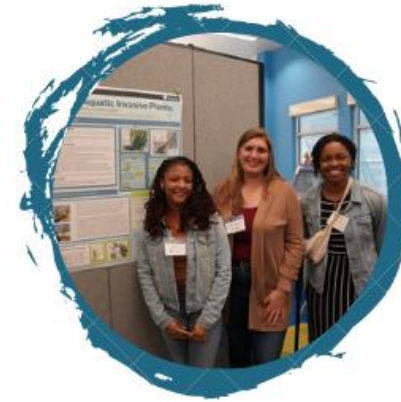
Diversity Pathway Programs

Diversity pathway programs are most effective when they...

- 1) **increase accessibility** of environmental **science learning experiences**
- 2) **couple multiple pathways of exposure and engagement** – e.g., academic opportunities, mentoring, community action/science projects, career exposure, networking
- 3) integrate more **culturally-relevant instructional approaches**








Culturally Relevant Approaches



- Create **professionally/academically rigorous** opportunities
- Provide youth with opportunities to **commemorate and strengthen their identities**, lived experiences, and culture
- Promote **equity and inclusivity in the learning space**
- Call for youth to **develop critical perspectives** that challenge societal inequalities

There is no “one size fits all”... embrace the journey and a growth mindset

Culturally Relevant Approaches

Practice	Description
Asset-Based Mindset 	Focus on strengths and positive traits
Trauma Informed Techniques 	Helps build trust and relationships with students
Positive Youth Development (student centered approaches) 	Instructors act as guides on the side, centering the student experience
Representation 	Use model naturalists that reflect the community you serve
Place-Based Learning 	Focus on nearby nature close to the community

Near-Peer Mentors



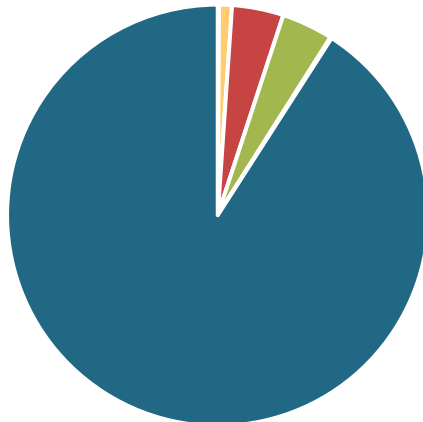
Racial & Ethnic Composition of Students & Teachers in Connecticut Schools

Racial & Ethnic Composition of Undergraduate Students at University of Connecticut

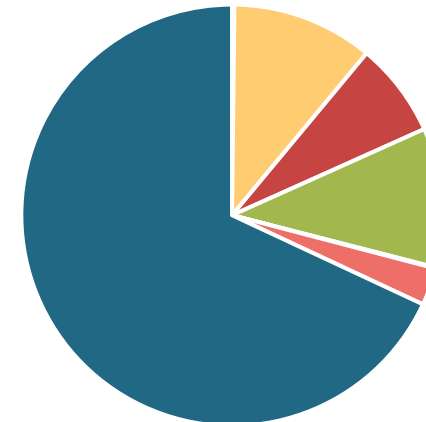
K-12 STUDENTS

K-12 TEACHERS

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS



- Asian
- Black/African American
- Hispanic/Latinx
- Two or More Races
- White



Source: University of Connecticut, Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, Undergraduate Demographics SY 2015-16

Source: CT Department of Education, EDSight, Educator Demographics SY 2015-16



Program Model



Reflect & Share

Pause and reflect on key mentors in your life...

How were they like you?

How were they different from you?

How did they engage with you?

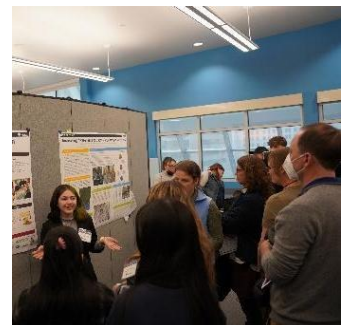
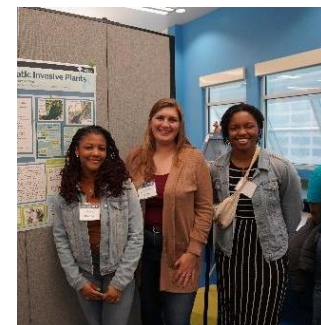
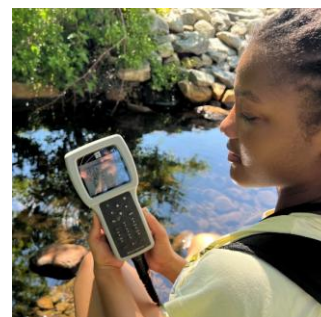
Conservation Ambassador Program (CAP)

Program Recruitment
(spring)

Weeklong
Residential Field
Experience
(summer)

Community-Based
Environmental
Action Project
(summer-winter)

Project Showcase
(spring)



Difference Maker Mentors (DMMs)



Undergraduate Course
"Community Engagement
for Environmental Action"
(spring)

Leadership
Co-facilitate CAP
field experience
(summer)

Mentorship
Guide teens on
community projects
(summer-winter)

Showcase
Co-present
projects with teens
(spring)

What our Difference Maker Mentors Bring



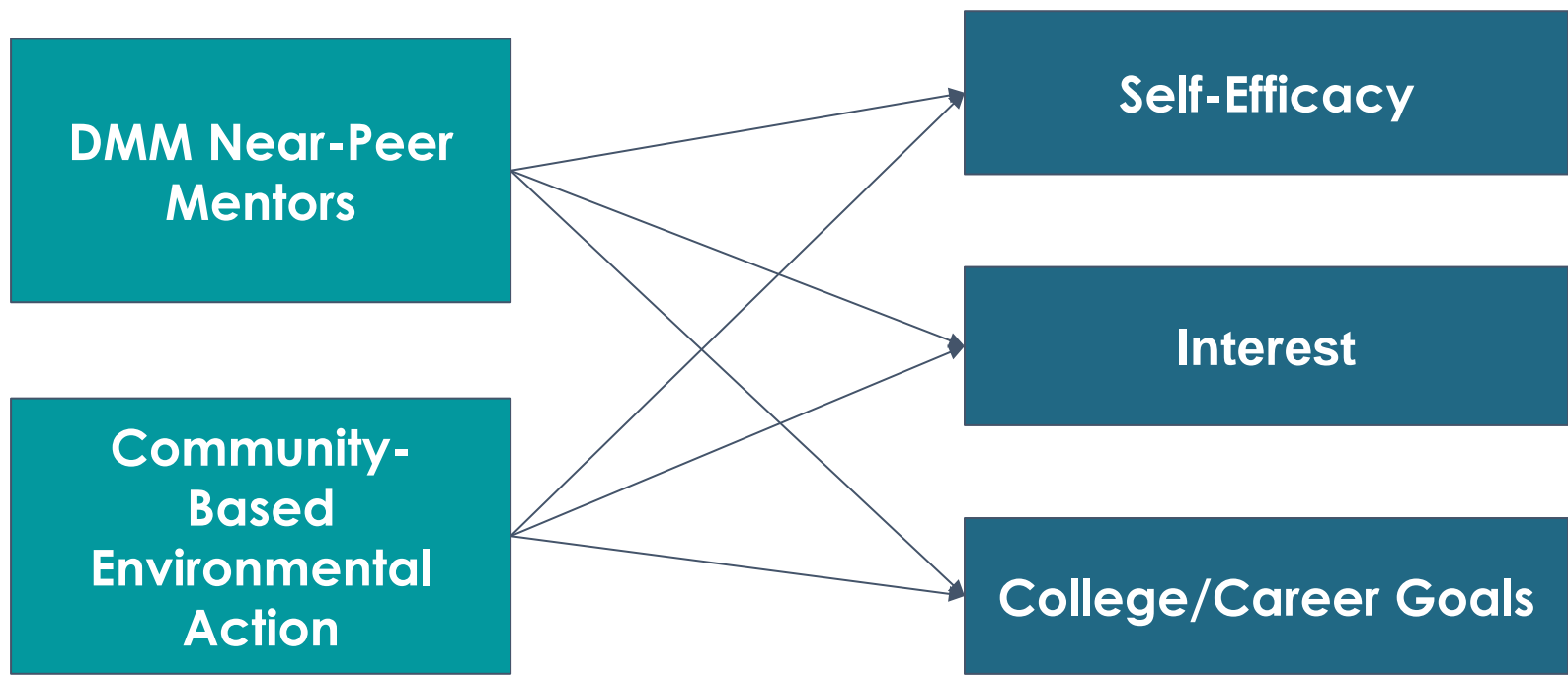
- Elevate ***diverse voices*** in CAP leadership
- Provide ***near-peer role models***
- Create a pathway for CAP teens to ***continue based-community environmental action***



Research



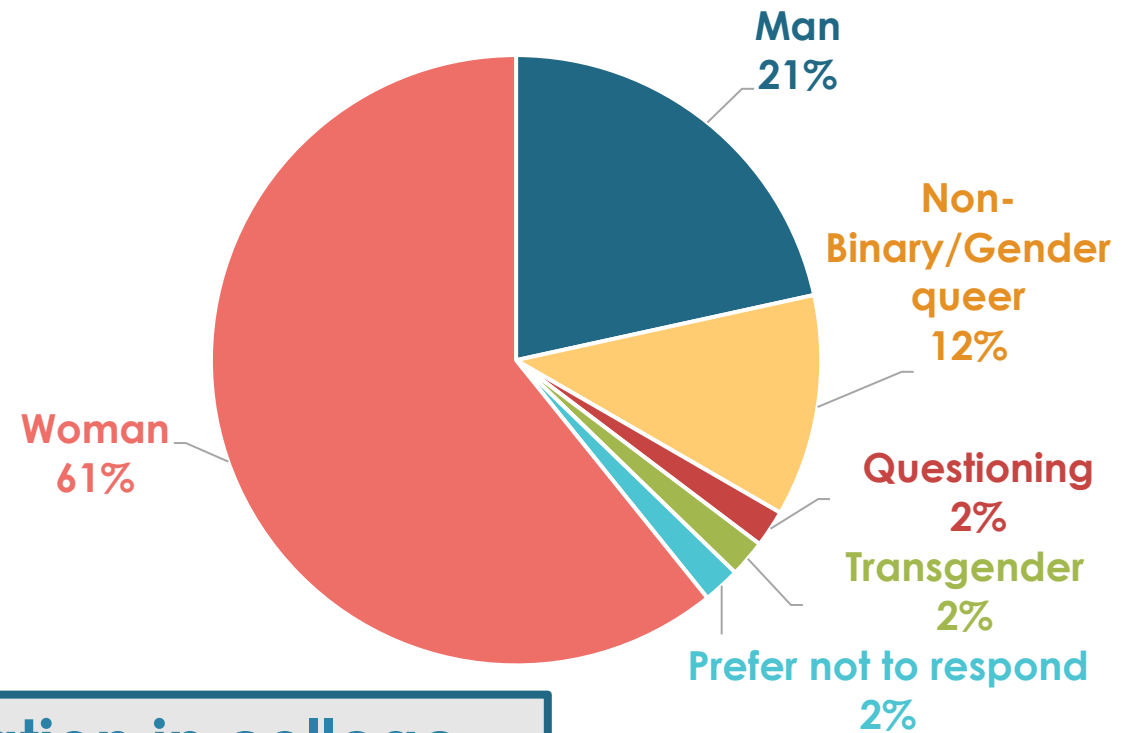
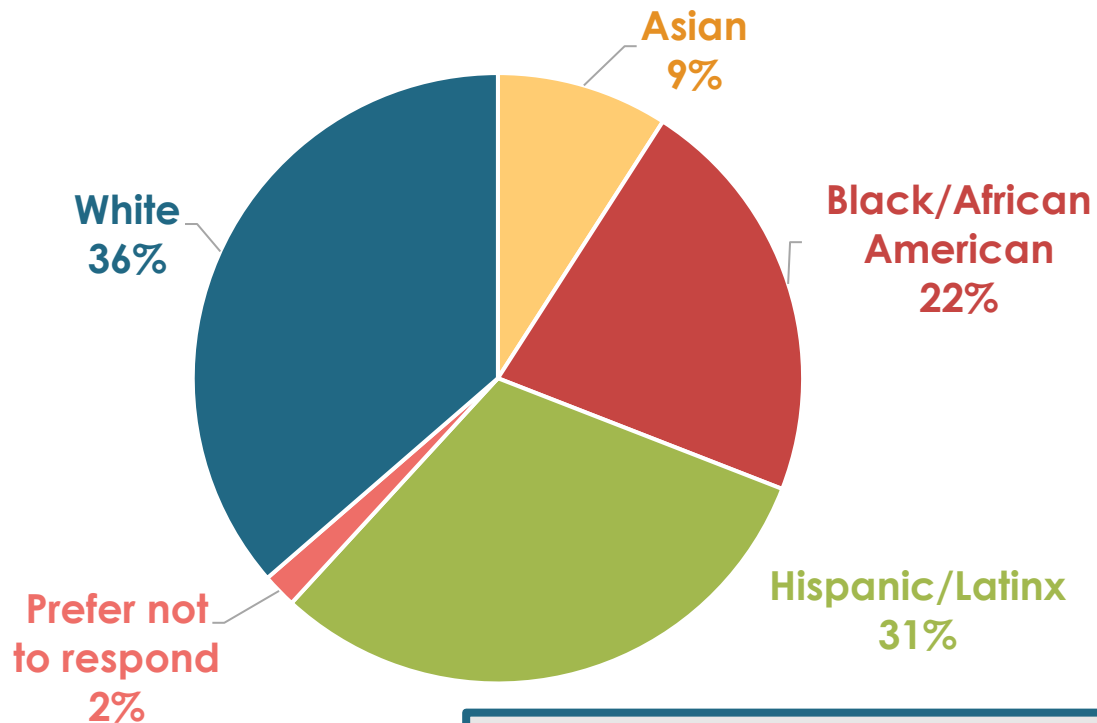
How do **near-peer mentors** and **community-based environmental action** affect **self-efficacy, interest, and career goals** of the **teen participants** and **undergrad mentors**?



Demographics of CAP Teens

Racial & Ethnic Composition of CAP Teen Participants (n=47)

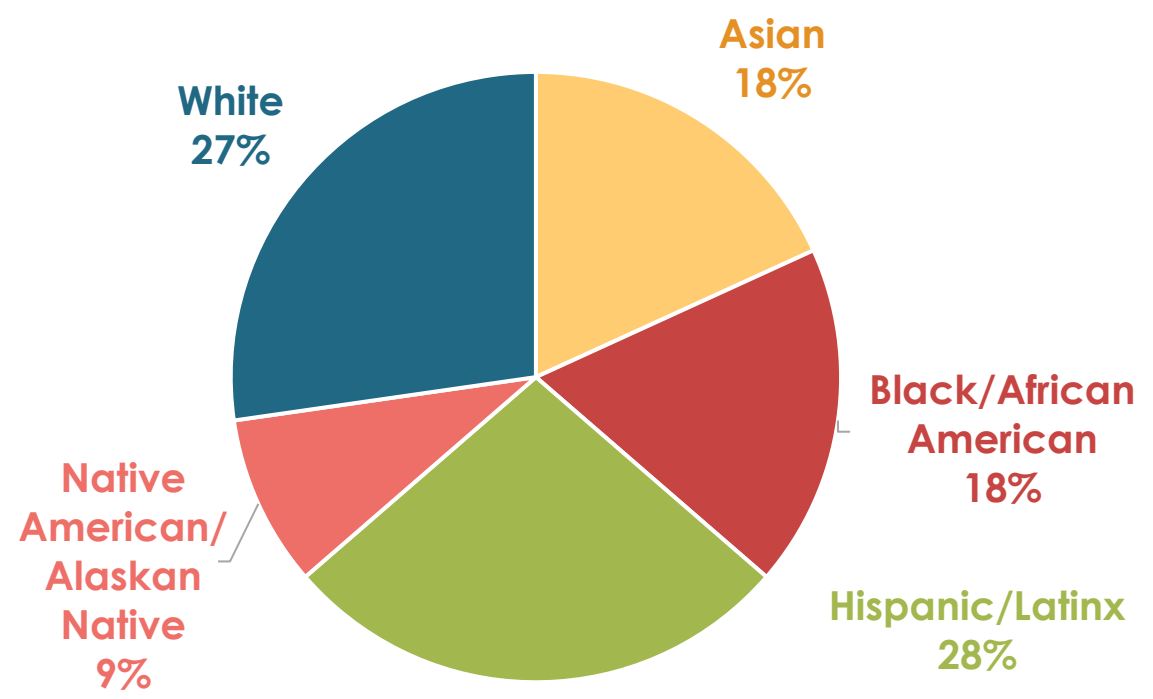
Gender Identity Composition of CAP Teen Participants (n=47)



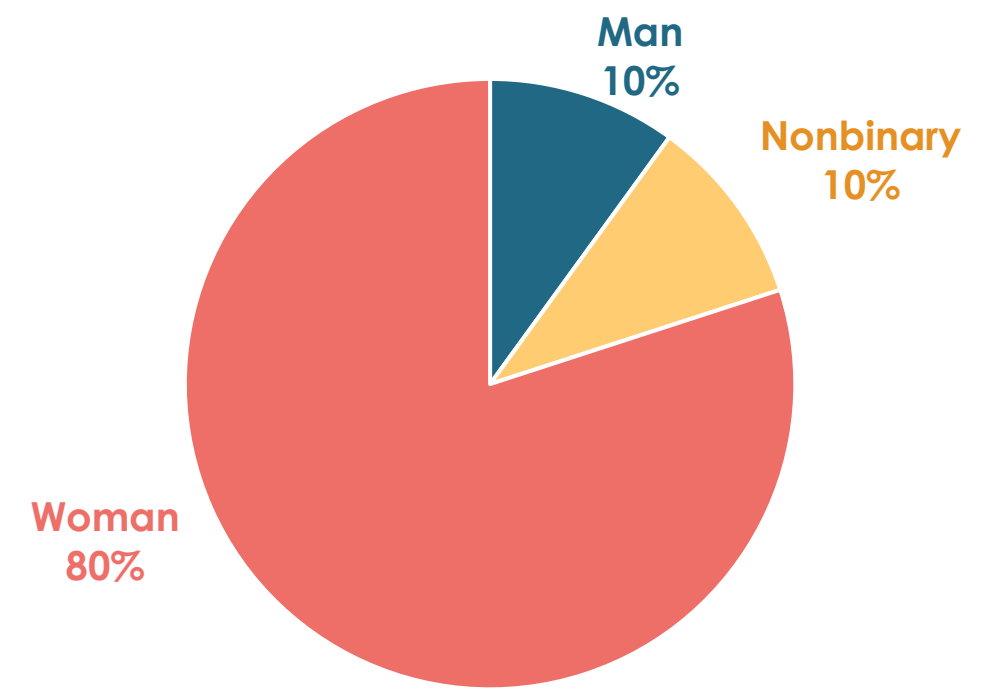
32% will be first generation in college

Demographics of Difference Maker Mentors (DMMs)

Racial & Ethnic Composition of Undergraduate DMMs (n=9)



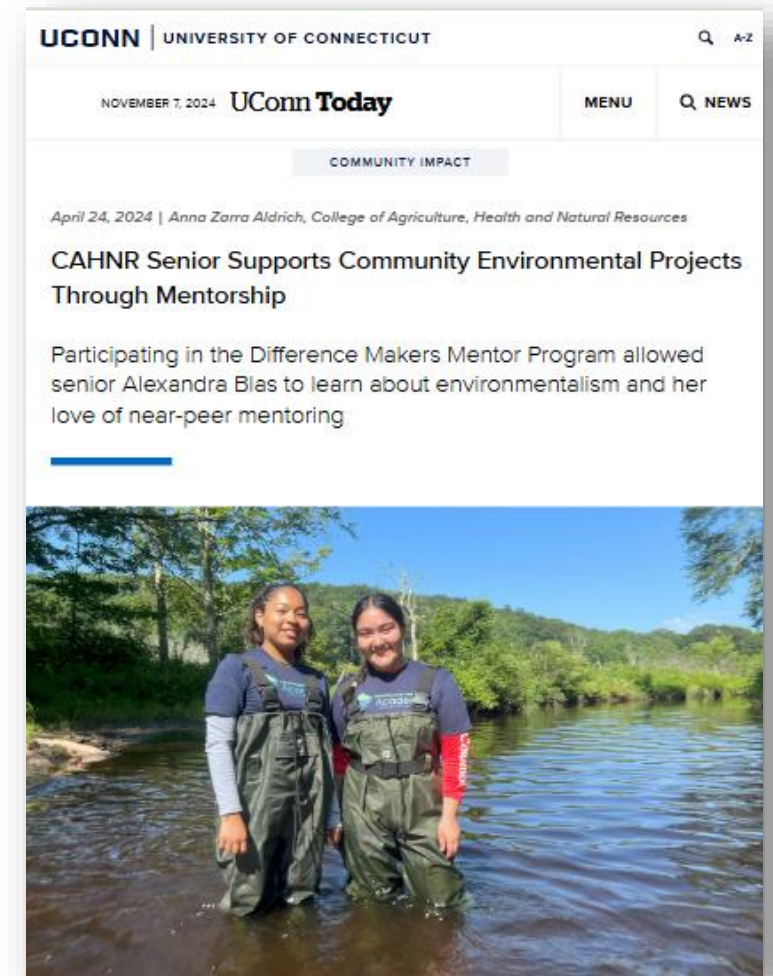
Gender Identity Composition of Undergraduate DMMs (n=9)



33% were first generation in college

Majors/Minors of DMMs

- Allied Health Sciences (1)
- Cognitive Science (1)
- Economics (2)
- Environmental Science/Studies (4)
- Family Sciences (1)
- Molecular & Cellular Biology (1)
- Natural Resources (1)





Interviews with CAP Teen Participants

(n = 14)



What did participating in the Conservation Ambassador Program mean to you?

What did you enjoy most about completing the community project? What was the hardest thing about completing the project?

How have your abilities or skills changed during CAP?

How have your college or career plans changed during CAP? Did you discuss these plans with your mentor? Did your mentor provide advice?

Did you feel like you could relate to your mentor, or like your mentor understood you?

After completing the community project and working with your mentor, do you feel more prepared for meeting your college or career goals?



Interviews with DMM Near-Peer Mentors

(n = 9)



What did participating in CAP as a Different Maker Mentor mean to you?

What did you enjoy most about working with your mentees? What was the hardest thing about working with your mentees?

How have your abilities or skills changed during CAP?

Thinking back to a year ago, before participating in CAP, what were your career or college plans? After participating in CAP, have those plans changed?

How did working with your mentees affect your interest in food, agriculture, or natural resources?

After completing the community project and working with your mentees, do you feel more prepared for meeting your college or career goals?



Results & Culturally Relevant Mentorship Practices



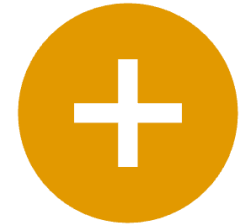
Asset Framing



Trauma Informed Care



Positive Youth Development



Representation



Place-Based Action



Result Themes



Reflection Prompts



Culturally Relevant Strategies



Theme: Connections with Mentors



HS Students

“[The mentors] would always mention like how they’re doing in college to kind of give us like perspective of...what it’s like to be in college as well as like **different possibilities that we can do when we’re there.**”

“[The mentors] definitely brought environmental science as a possible career choice. Like they really made it...a point to kind of **show the value of it.**”

Mentors

“I liked developing these projects with them and...guiding them. Aside from just the project, they would ask me about school stuff. Some of them are applying to college so I just think being kind of **a tool they could go to when they need something** was a good part of [the program].”

Reflect & Share

In your programs...

How are mentors prepared for their role?

**How do you support connections between
mentors and mentees?**

Strategies: Connections with Mentors

Working Together Best Practices

- Conflict management
- Co-design project (*sharing power*)
- Establish check-ins, communication, expectations (*reliable, supportive, predictable*)
- Asset-based relationships (*identities and lived experiences as strengths*)
- Lifelong learning (*role modeling, growth mindset*)
- Share their college/career journey (*role modeling*)



Representation



Trauma
Informed Care



Asset Framing



Strategies: Trauma-Informed Care Mentorship



Create a safe space

Act with care & kindness

Build trusting relationships

Establish routines

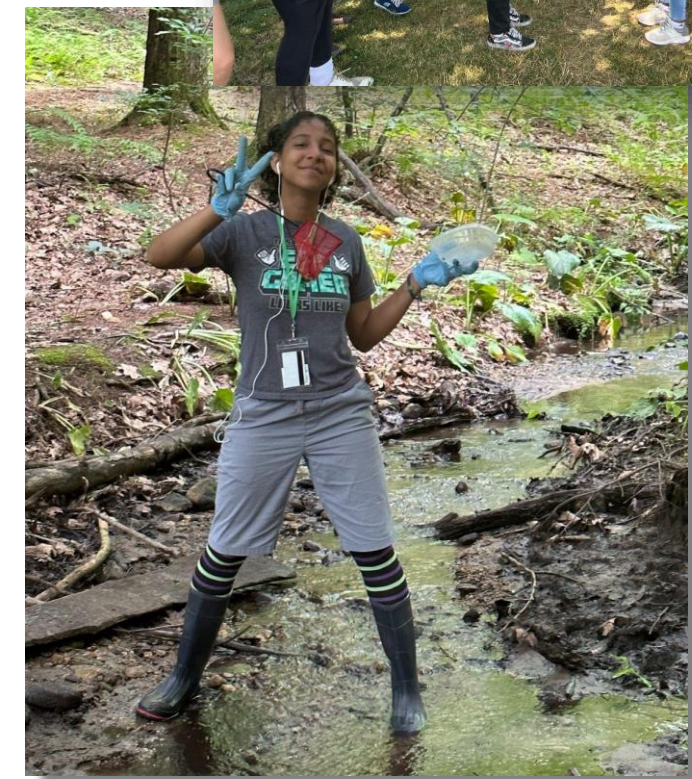
Share plan & preparation

Allow for autonomy

Acknowledge fears

Avoid shaming

Be mindful of language





Strategies: Asset Framing

Individuals and communities are valued for ***what they bring*** rather than being characterized by what they lack

Instead of...	Consider...
Starting with deficiencies and needs	Starting with strengths and assets
Responding to problems	Identifying opportunities
Focusing on “fixing” people	Focusing on addressing inequity and developing potential
Focusing on expert knowledge	Recognizing community expertise and personal strengths

Strategies: Project Planning Document

Establishing Routines & Expectations

and

Asset Mapping

guide project
development



Conservation Ambassador Program Step-by-Step Guide to Develop Your Community Environmental Action Project

Project Overview

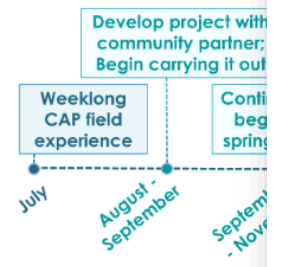
Goal: With your NRCA Difference Maker Mentor and community partner, *design a Community Environmental Action Project* that addresses a socio-environmental challenge or opportunity within your community. Specifically, the project should:

Conservation Ambassador Program: project resources.

- Project Commitments & Stance:** project, your *Community Environmental Action Project*
- I am committed to asking a real question
 - I am committed to making sure even if I don't find an environmental solution/decision, I will still work towards an equitable future

Project Timeline

Here are the milestones of the program:



Using Asset & Hazard Mapping to Brainstorm a Project Topic

Before you determine your project topic, you need to *get to know your community and identify your own assets*. The goal is to find a project topic that brings together your interests as well as your community's needs.

STEP ONE: Map Out Your Assets & Interests.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time? What academic topic(s) are you most excited about? What's something you consider yourself good at? What's something new you want to learn? Jot down your assets in the table below. They do NOT need to be related to the environment. You can include activities like art, technology (e.g., gaming) and sports, etc.

Your Interests & Assets
(e.g., recreation, extracurricular activities)
(e.g., things like writing, art, technology)
(e.g., specific environmental issues)
(e.g., anything else that motivates you or inspires you)

STEP TWO: Community Assets.

Your community is full of amazing assets! Assets can be important places like schools, parks or organizations, but also the resources, skills and talents of individuals and groups of people. Explore the diverse assets in your community using online searches and maps, news articles, local social media pages, and personal reflections. *Think broadly about assets that are relevant for addressing socio-environmental challenges (e.g., neighborhood or youth groups, vacant lots, community members with knowledge of community history).* In the tables below, describe your communities' assets and provide supporting material or sources.

People as Assets	
Examples of people in your community:	Questions to think about:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers and coaches • Youth community leaders • Government officials • Conservation commission members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who in your community inspires you? • Who do you consider a leader or changemaker? • What skills, knowledge, <u>resource</u>, etc. do they contribute to the community?
Use the space below to list <i>specific</i> people or groups of people in your community	
Add your sources or supporting materials (e.g., photos, web link, screenshot)	

Organizations, and Businesses as Assets	
Examples of services, organizations, and businesses:	Questions to think about:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trash and recycling services • Boys and Girls Club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What businesses or local companies do you or folks you know support?



Visit:
nrca.uconn.edu/cap/#resources



Theme: Exposure to Conservation & Environmental Topics/Fields



HS Students

“Never in a million years did I ever think I’d go out and like hike in the rain or, you know, go out and stand in a river and catch fish. I think going out and actually like **physically doing something** I thought **was the best kind of learning experience.**”

“I knew I wanted to be in a STEM field, but I didn’t know specifically where I wanted to be, so... the CAP program was a great opportunity for me to **experience what an environmental scientist does.**”

Mentors

“It definitely increased my interest...you’re educating yourself on [environmental issues] so [the program] provided that route for me and the students to **actually learn about these issues** that so many people in the world face.”

Reflect & Share

In your programs...

What are some unique ways you engage mentors and mentees in various environmental fields?

Strategies: Exposure to Conservation & Environmental Topics/Fields



Place-Based
Action

Representation

- Culturally-relevant and rigorous curriculum grounded in...
 - disciplinary techniques
 - experiential learning
- Taught by university professors and experts from various organizations



Strategies: Exposure to Conservation & Environmental Topics/Fields

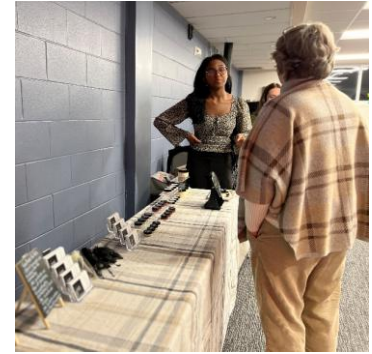


Place-Based
Action

Representation

Environmental action projects are **co-designed** with community **partner** and near-peer **mentor**

View projects:
nrca.uconn.edu/projects





Theme: Development of Leadership, Communication Skills & Self-Efficacy



HS Students

“I **took a leadership role in this project** and did it on my own, and obviously I had help along the way, but...it was the first time I had been really like the one in charge of a project.”

“It **taught me how to navigate, you know, different groups of people** and how to reach out to people.”

Mentors

“I feel like they seemed a little scared of [communicating with adults] at first during the field experience, but towards the end I could see them definitely come out of their shells and **be more confident.**”

“Definitely communication skills and leadership skills...also some **creativity**, like when we created the culturally-responsive activities.”



Theme: Development of Leadership, Communication Skills & Self-Efficacy



HS Students

“For the community action project, I think that it really like gave me the opportunity to even **try and create some sort of change in my community.**”

“It was cool to **actually go out and do something** instead of just reading an article about something.”

Reflect & Share

In your programs...

What opportunities for leadership development do you provide for mentors and mentees?



Positive Youth Development

Strategies: Development of Leadership, Communication Skills & Self-Efficacy

EMAIL ETIQUETTE

A GUIDE FOR CAP STUDENTS

GREETING

- Use Dear (Dr./Mr./Ms) only if you are sure of their status/pronouns
- If unsure, use their full name
 - ex) "Dear Laura Cisneros"

INFORMATIVE SUBJECT LINE

- Clearly state the reason for your email
 - ex) "Community Partner for UConn NRCA Student Environmental Action Project?"

INTRODUCE YOURSELF

- Initial contact? State who you are!
 - "I am (full name) a student from (high school/city)"

KEEP IT CONCISE

Clear and concise definition with academic language, real world examples and non-examples.

PROFESSIONALISM

Modelled Practice (I Do), Guided Practice (We Do) and Independent Practice (You Do)

THANKS & SALUTATIONS

Revisit learning intentions and success criteria. Discuss relevance and next steps.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED FOR YOUR FIRST COMMUNITY PARTNER MEETING

A GUIDE FOR CAP STUDENTS

PRE-MEETING

- Do Your Research
 - DMM/GM prc resources: wh area of speci
- Prepare Question
 - Get to know y
 - ex) "What led
- Have a General D
 - Remember: Yi creation with
 - Be flexible to
- Identify Your "Why"
 - Why should yc with you?
 - Why does you
 - A clear sense of reference f from this mor

DURING MEETING

- Introduce Yourself
 - (your name, school, why you are interested in the project)
- Define Roles and f
 - What resource community pa project?
 - What kind of s project to be s
- Listen Attentively
 - DMM/GM will mentee post-r
- Ask Questions as t
 - Don't wait to c asked after th
- Discuss Next Steps
 - Let confirmed they will recei program leads
- Thanks and Saluta
 - Thank the com meet
 - If there are a the community understanding

POST-MEETING

- Immediate Follow-Up Communication
 - Within 2-3 days post-meeting, thank the community partner for accepting the role
 - Address any progress made during this time
 - NRCA staff sends any necessary information or paperwork to community partner
- Communication throughout Project Development
 - Provide any necessary updates throughout the project development with DMM/GM CCed
 - Request DMM/GM to proofread emails before sending
 - Reach out regarding any resources needed
- Inform NRCA Staff Community Partner has been Confirmed
- Social Media
 - Take photos throughout the project development to be featured on NRCA social media

Materials made by near-peer mentors to support teen leadership

- Co-designed project
- Transfer power
- Centering, valuing, elevating student voices & goals



Positive Youth
Development

Strategies: Development of Leadership, Communication Skills & Self-Efficacy

*Internal and external
recognition of leadership*



**YOUTH IN
STEM**
A Leadership & Changemaker Summit

Natural Resources Conservation
Academy
University of Connecticut

Connecticut
Science Center

Conclusions

- Near-peer mentors show teen participants what college is like, showing the teens that people “like them” can succeed in college
- Both teens and undergrad mentors felt they improved their leadership and communication skills through the program
- Both groups felt more prepared for reaching their college and career goals after participating in CAP

Thanks for Joining! Questions?

s.uconn.edu/naaee

access these slides 

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Community Foundation
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