Conceptualisations of Mentorability: An Exploration of Mentee Perspectives in a University Mentorship Programme

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Background

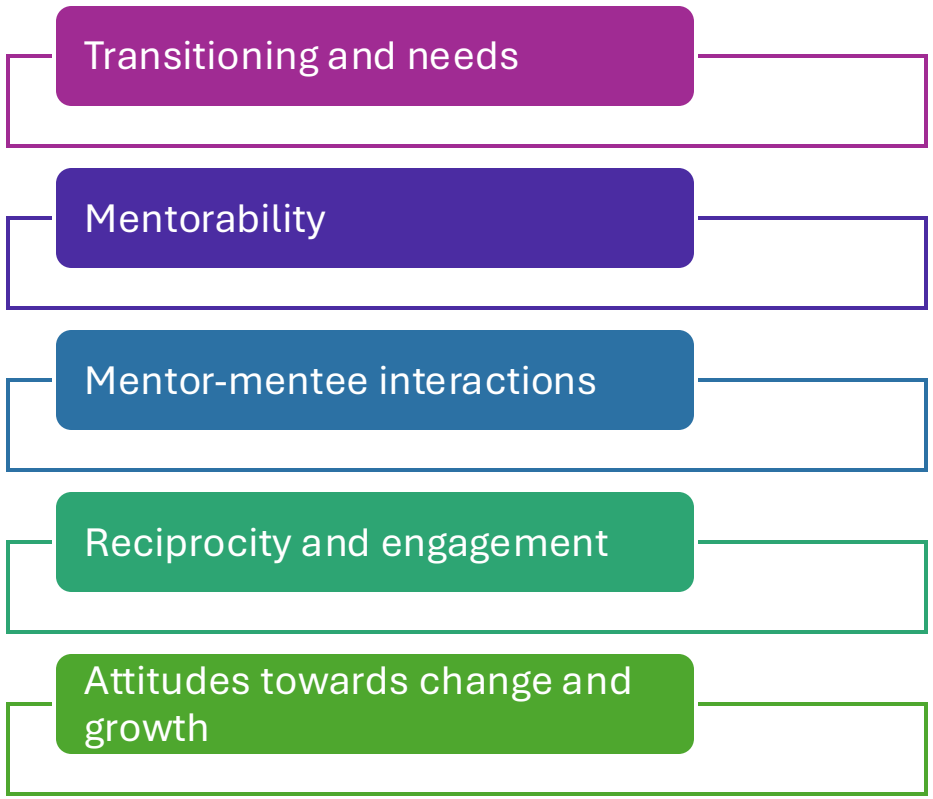
- University mentorship programmes have become increasingly prominent as a form of ‘high-impact practice’ towards student success.
- This is corroborated by a growing body of literature describing their benefits for both mentors and mentees, as well as their crucial role in facilitating a seamless transition for first year students.
- At Wits University, the First-Year Experience Mentorship Programme operates centrally throughout the year, independent of faculties, and ensures that every first-year student, or ‘mentee’ is allocated a mentor.
- However, several challenges undermine the effectiveness of mentorship programmes, including low mentee engagement and duplication in functions between the centrally coordinated First-Year Experience Mentorship Programme and faculty-specific initiatives, scholarships, and other institutional clubs and societies.
- Another obstacle, often overlooked in mentorship programmes, is the concept of ‘mentorability’.
- Mentorability refers to the capacity or **potential of an individual to benefit from a mentoring relationship.** Someone who is highly mentorable tends to be receptive to guidance, actively seeks out learning opportunities, and demonstrates a willingness to adapt and improve based on mentor input.

Theoretical Underpinning

- Mentorability in a university mentorship programme can be conceptualised by students as the ability to engage effectively with their mentors, absorb knowledge and guidance, and apply it to enhance their personal and academic growth.
- Students may perceive mentorability as the willingness to actively participate in the mentoring process, demonstrate openness to feedback, and show a genuine interest in self-improvement.
- According to Paula Crespí & Jorge López (2023), an effective mentoring programme focuses on developing intrapersonal competences such as proactivity, self-reliance, self-awareness, self-acceptance, search for meaning in life, and orientation to excellence through experiential learning methodologies.
- This highlights the importance of students being receptive to acquiring these competences from their mentors (Crespí & López, 2023).
- Researchers developed a mentorability scale based on a systematic review of postsecondary mentoring literature and in-depth interviews with first-year students to understand their definitions of mentoring and mentorability (Black & Taylor, 2018; Taylor & Black, 2018).

Methodology: Focus Group Discussions

Broad focal areas of discussion



Objective

- To understand experiences and perceptions of current and former mentees, including those who discontinued the FYE mentorship programme

Sampling Method

- Purposive sampling was employed to target three specific groups:
  - Current mentees
  - Former mentees currently in their second year
  - Mentees who discontinued the programme

Participants

- A total of 21 students participated in 6 focus groups.
- Initially targeted 42 students, but only 21 attended despite follow-ups
- Recruitment was done telephonically, followed by email confirmation of availability
- Factors affecting participation included proximity to exam time and the flu season, leading to last-minute cancellations

Methodology: Focus Group Discussions

Recruitment and Consent

- Ethics approval obtained
- An online form was completed by students prior to focus group discussions.
- Consent was obtained again during the focus groups, emphasizing:
  - The purpose of the study
  - Voluntary participation
  - Potential audio recording of sessions
  - Use of direct quotations
  - Right to withdraw at any time

Participant Demographics

- Participants came from various faculties, with a majority being female students.

Focus Groups

- Conducted using a structured interview guide
- Each session lasted between 90 to 120 minutes

Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis was utilized to analyse the data collected from the focus groups

Methodology: Mentorability Scales

Objective: To understand students; predisposition and willingness to be mentorable

Sampling Method:

1. Purposive Sampling-Targeted first years only

Participants:

Survey was distributed to at all first-year students (approx.6338) from all faculties

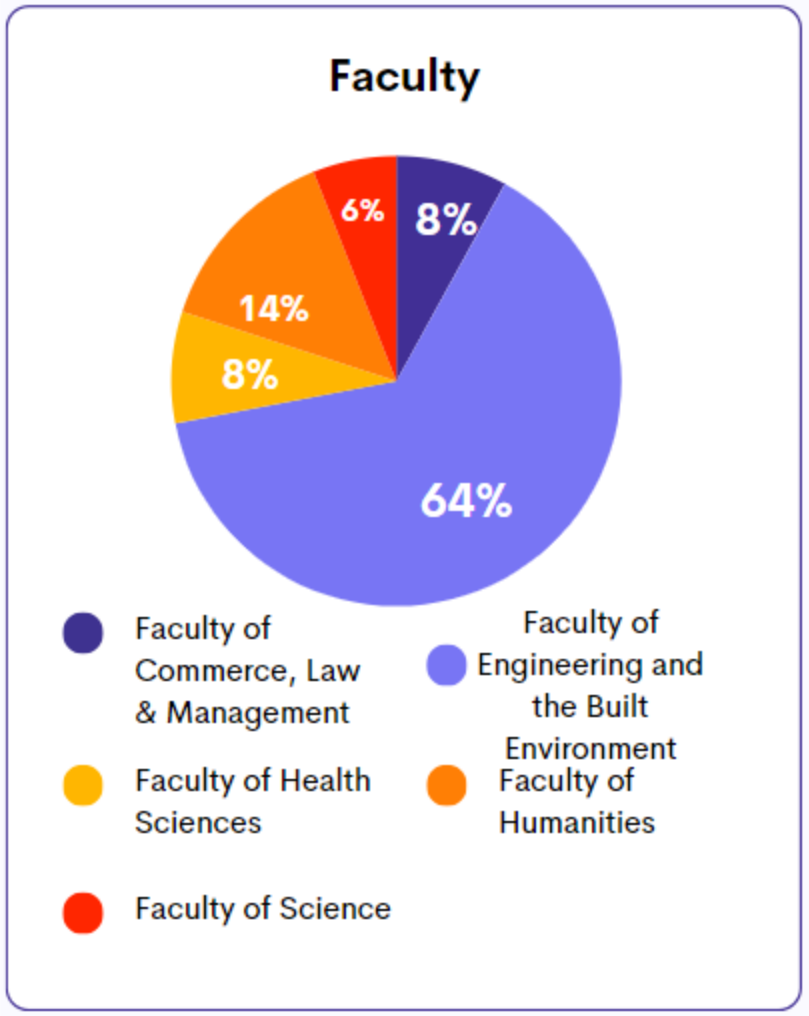
973 respondents (15% response rate)

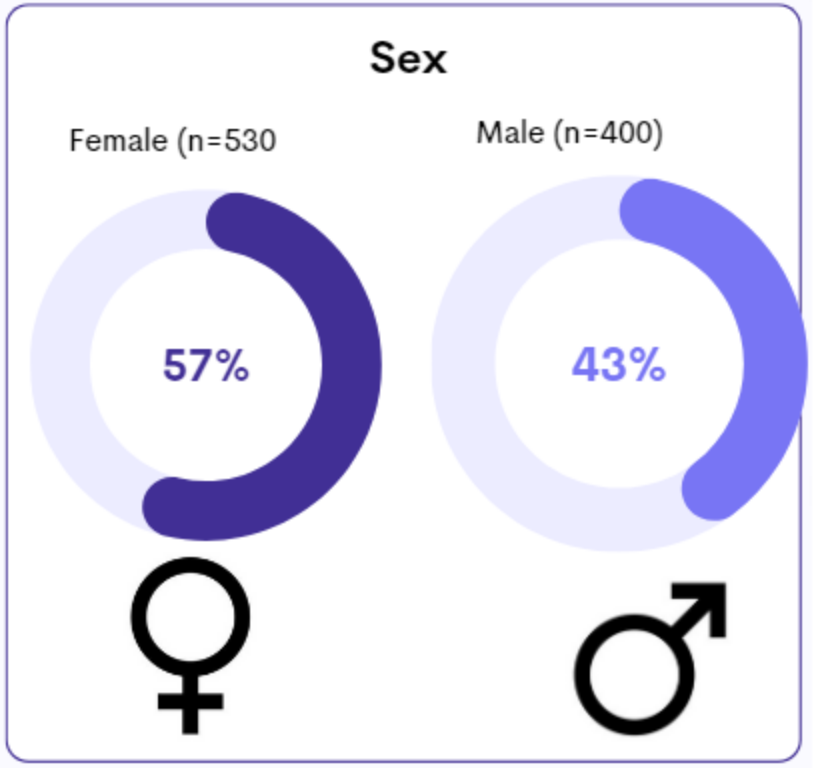
Methodology: Mentorability Scales

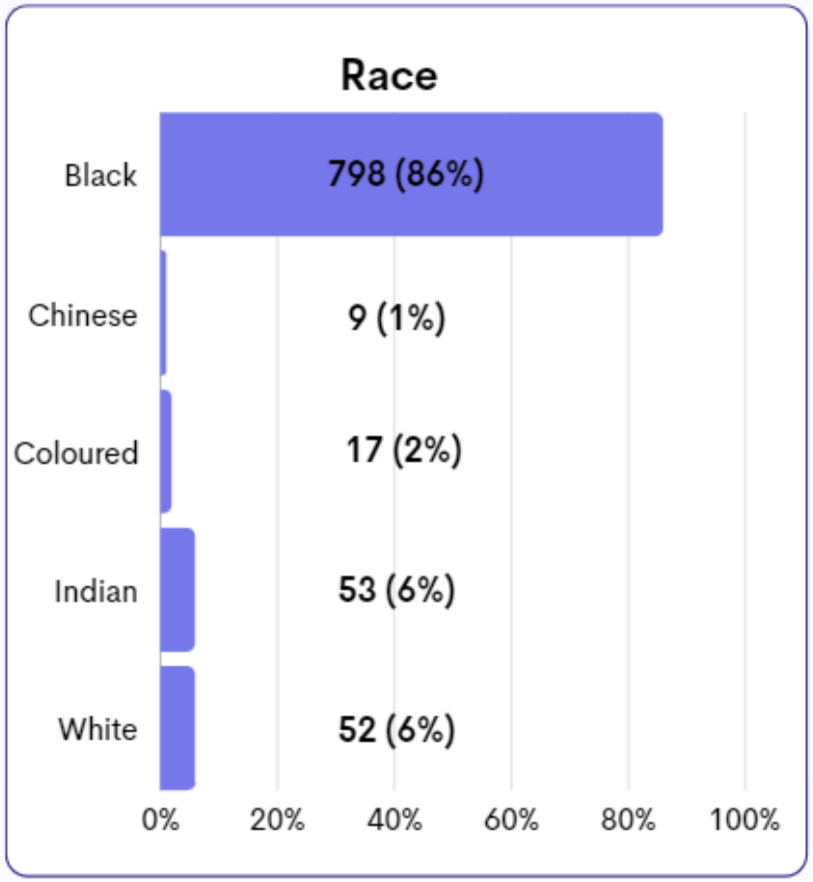
- **Recruitment strategy:**
  - Check-in meetings
  - Distribution of QR Codes
  - 10-minute faculty slots
  - Survey link posted on faculty Learning Management sites.
  - Survey link posted on FYE Learning Management sites.

- **Data Analysis:**
  - Means were calculated to obtain the averages of students' responses per item.
  - Frequencies were calculated to see how the responses were distributed across the scales.

Sample-Demographic Descriptives





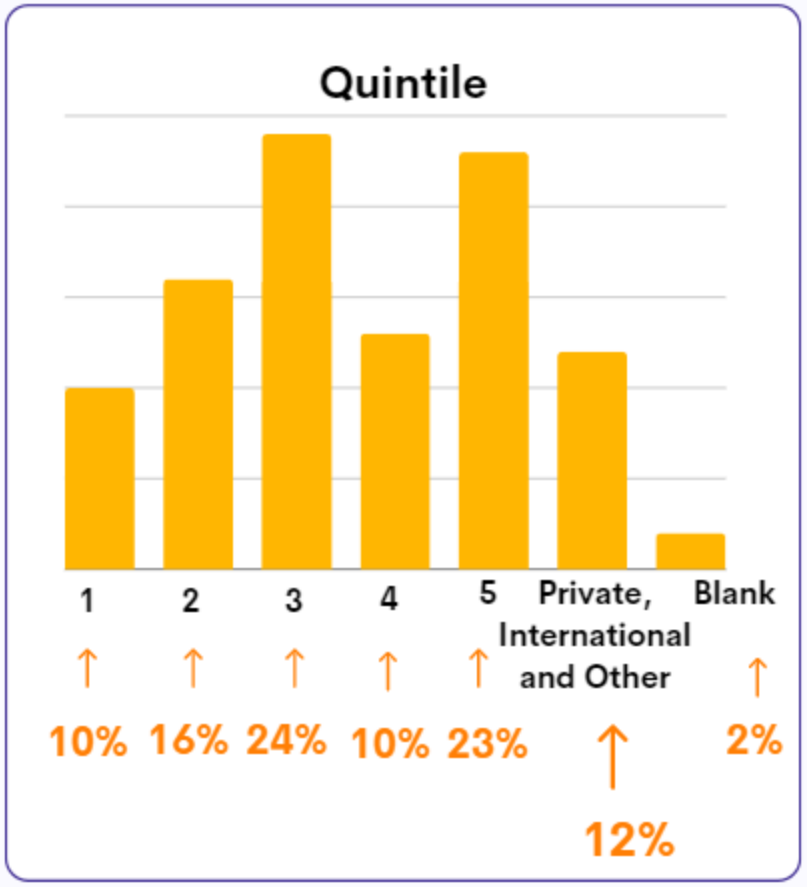


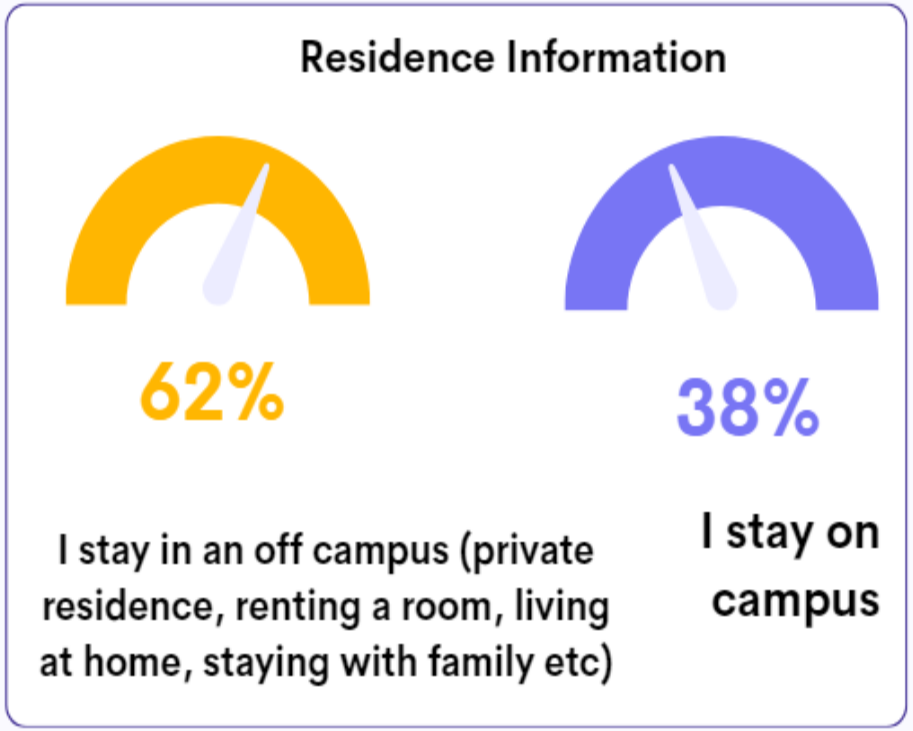
Sample Size = 973

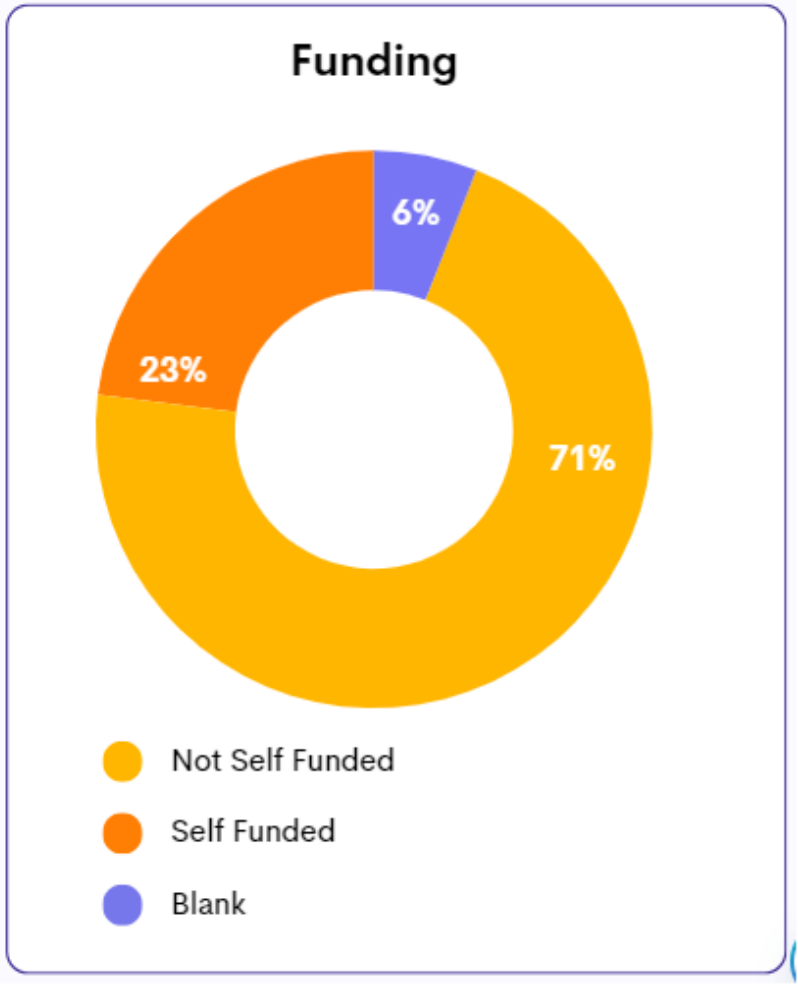
15% of overall first year population

73% are participating in a mentoring relationship

Sample-Demographic Descriptives







Quantitative tool (Black & Taylor (2018)

Mentee Commitment to the FYE Mentoring Relationship

Item	Rate the level of importance of each item in relation to your commitment to the FYE mentoring relationship	1 Not at all important	2 Low importance	3 Slightly important	4 Neutral	5 Moderately important	6 Very important	7 Extremely important
#1	Be open to feedback from your mentor							
#2	Commit time to a mentoring partnership							
#3	Use advice from your mentor							
#4	Participate in co-curricular activities with your mentor							
#5	Attend regular meetings with your mentor							
#6	Discuss your social life with your mentor							
#7	Discuss your academic life with your mentor							
#8	Provide your mentor feedback							
#9	Listen to your mentor							
#10	Be respectful of your mentor							

Mentee Qualities deemed important for the FYE Mentoring Relationship

Item	How important are the following MENTEE qualities?	1 Not at all important	2 Low importance	3 Slightly important	4 Neutral	5 Moderately important	6 Very important	7 Extremely important
#1	Open-mindedness							
#2	Willingness to engage							
#3	Communicative							
#4	Responsible							
#5	Proactive							
#6	Realistic							
#7	Professional							
#8	Good listener							
#9	Being on-time							
#10	Being organized							

Scale Interpretations

Range	Highest minus lowest	7-1=6
Interval	Range divided by highest scale	6/7=0,85

Scales	Intervals	Difference
1=Not at all important	1.00-1.85	0.85
2=Low importance	1.86-2.71	0.85
3=Slightly important	2.72-3.57	0.85
4=Neutral	3.58-4.43	0.85
5=Moderately important	4.44-5.29	0.85
6=Very important	5.30-6.15	0.85
7=Extremely important	6.16-7.00	0.84

Anything below 4,43= Neutral and of less importance

Anything above 4,43= deemed important

Overall analysis: Mentees commitment to the FYE Mentorship Programme

Rate the level of importance of each item in relation to your commitment to the FYE mentoring relationship	Rank	Degree
Q1:Be open to feedback from your mentor	5,55	Very important
Q2:Commit time to a mentoring partnership	5,41	Very important
Q3:Use advice from your mentor	5,84	Very important
Q4:Participate in co-curricular activities with your mentor	5,14	Moderately important
Q5:Attend regular meetings with your mentor	5,51	Very important
Q6:Discuss your social life with your mentor	4,57	Moderately important
Q7:Discuss your academic life with your mentor	5,81	Very important
Q8:Provide your mentor feedback	5,63	Very important
Q9:Listen to your mentor	5,95	Very important
Q10:Be respectful of your mentor	6,32	Extremely important

1=Not important at all
7= Extremely important

Overall analysis: Importance of Mentee Qualities

How important are the following MENTEE qualities?	Rank	Degree
Q1:Open-mindedness	5,98	Very important
Q2:Willingness to engage	6,10	Very important
Q3:Communicative	6,17	Extremely important
Q4:Responsible	6,12	Very important
Q5:Proactive	5,92	Very important
Q6:Realistic	6,05	Very important
Q7:Professional	6,03	Very important
Q8:Good listener	6,21	Extremely important
Q9:Being on-time	6,09	Very important
Q10:Being organized	6,11	Very important

1=Not important at all
7= Extremely important

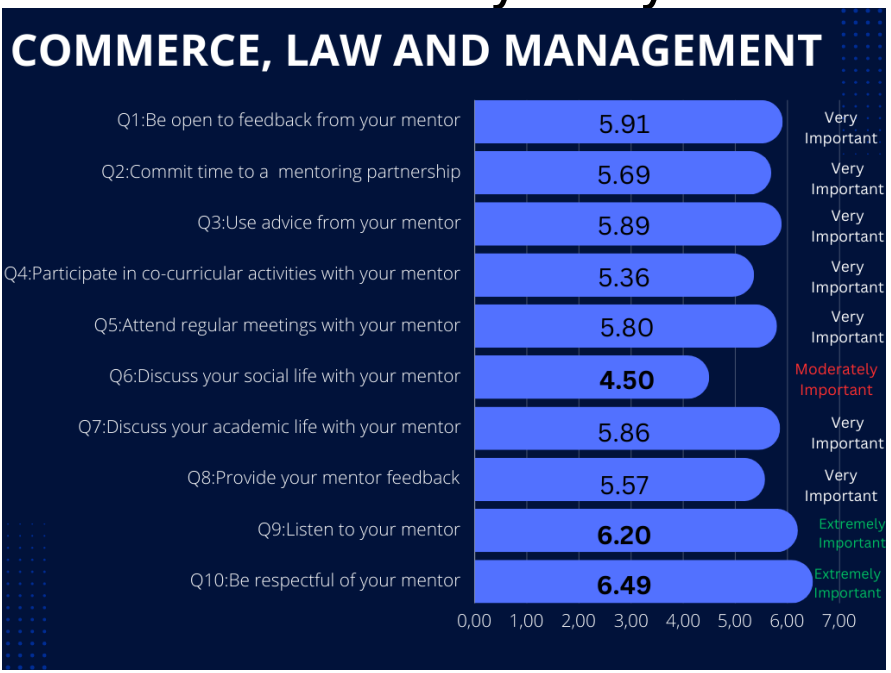
Mentees commitment to the FYE Mentorship Programme

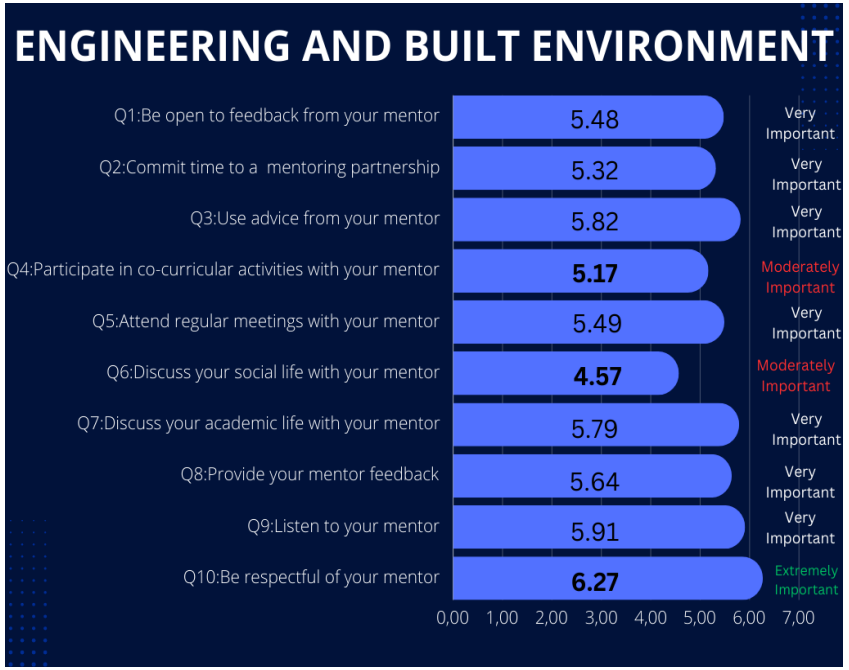
Rate the level of importance of each item in relation to your commitment to the FYE mentoring relationship	Not at all important		Low importance		Slightly important		Neutral		Moderately important		Very important		Extremely important	
Q1:Be open to feedback from your mentor	19	2%	19	2%	36	3%	113	11%	180	17%	357	35%	249	24%
Q2:Commit time to a mentoring partnership	21	2%	30	3%	42	4%	123	12%	206	20%	322	31%	299	29%
Q3:Use advice from your mentor	12	1%	14	1%	29	3%	62	6%	153	15%	383	37%	320	31%
Q4:Participate in co-curricular activities with your mentor	38	4%	40	4%	50	5%	161	16%	216	21%	262	25%	206	20%
Q5:Attend regular meetings with your mentor	22	2%	26	3%	42	4%	109	11%	196	19%	305	30%	273	27%
Q6:Discuss your social life with your mentor	57	6%	71	7%	94	9%	221	21%	234	23%	157	15%	139	14%
Q7:Discuss your academic life with your mentor	20	2%	16	2%	29	3%	77	7%	152	15%	311	30%	368	36%
Q8:Provide your mentor feedback	20	2%	21	2%	35	3%	93	9%	178	17%	336	33%	290	28%
Q9:Listen to your mentor	16	2%	12	1%	22	2%	48	5%	136	13%	362	35%	377	37%
Q10:Be respectful of your mentor	11	1%	11	1%	13	1%	28	3%	53	5%	297	29%	560	54%

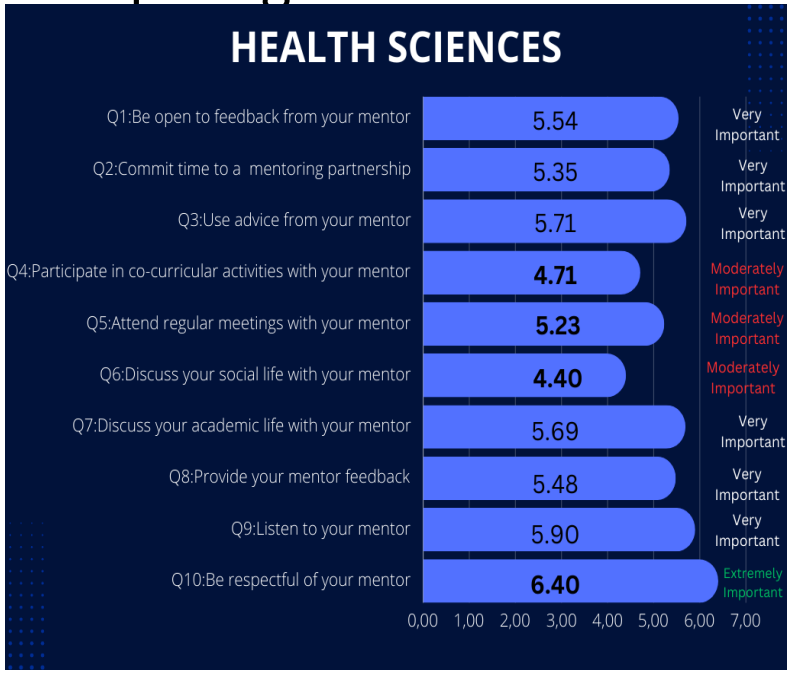
Importance of Mentee Qualities

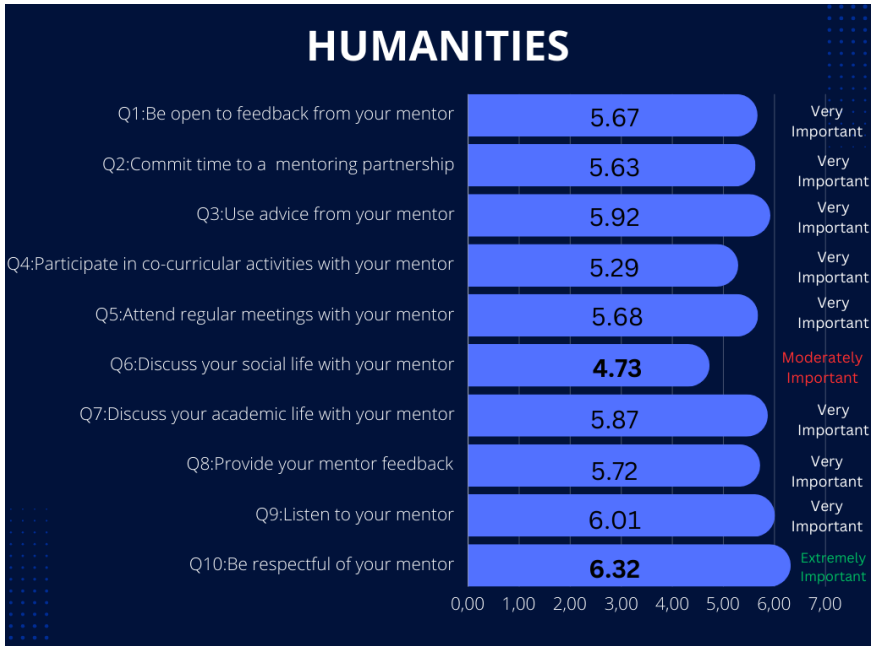
How important are the following MENTEE qualities?	Not at all important		Low importance		Slightly important		Neutral		Moderately important		Very important		Extremely important	
Q1:Open-mindedness	16	2%	7	1%	29	3%	45	5%	142	15%	329	34%	405	42%
Q2:Willingness to engage	10	1%	11	1%	15	2%	46	5%	111	11%	340	35%	440	45%
Q3:Communicative	9	1%	12	1%	13	1%	41	4%	92	9%	332	34%	474	49%
Q4:Responsible	10	1%	7	1%	23	2%	48	5%	95	10%	337	35%	453	47%
Q5:Proactive	10	1%	11	1%	16	2%	72	7%	153	16%	352	36%	359	37%
Q6:Realistic	12	1%	6	1%	23	2%	57	6%	110	11%	339	35%	426	44%
Q7:Professional	10	1%	10	1%	26	3%	69	7%	107	11%	313	32%	438	45%
Q8:Good listener	10	1%	9	1%	16	2%	38	4%	77	8%	331	34%	492	51%
Q9:Being on-time	12	1%	9	1%	19	2%	63	6%	97	10%	311	32%	462	47%
Q10:Being organized	13	1%	8	1%	20	2%	50	5%	103	11%	312	32%	467	48%

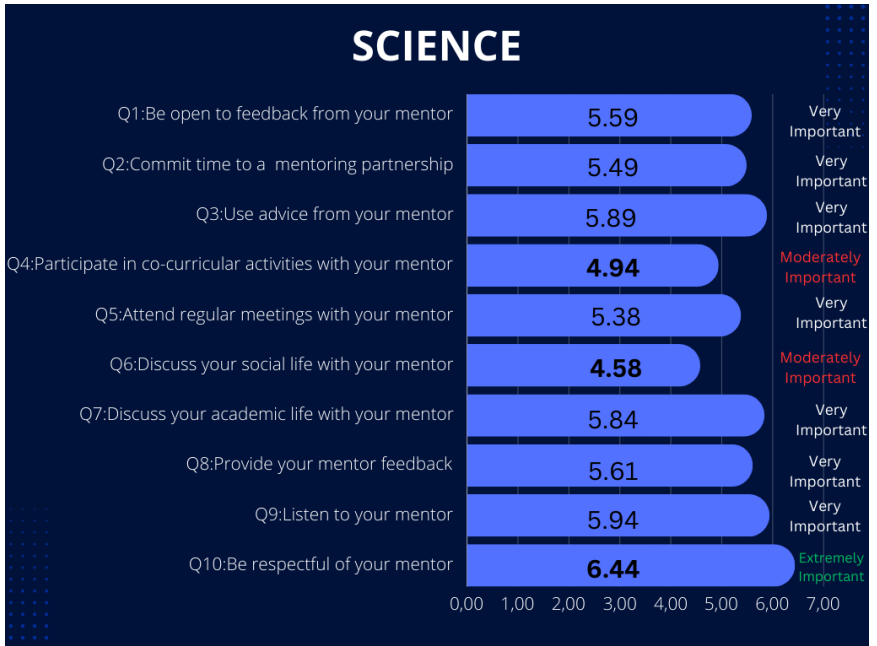
Faculty analysis: Mentees commitment to the FYE Mentorship Programme



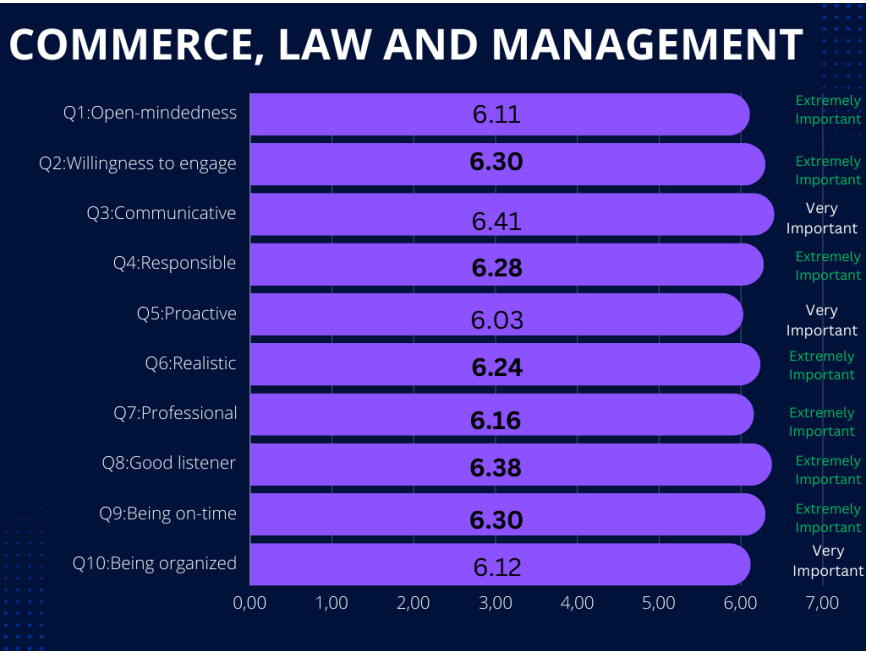


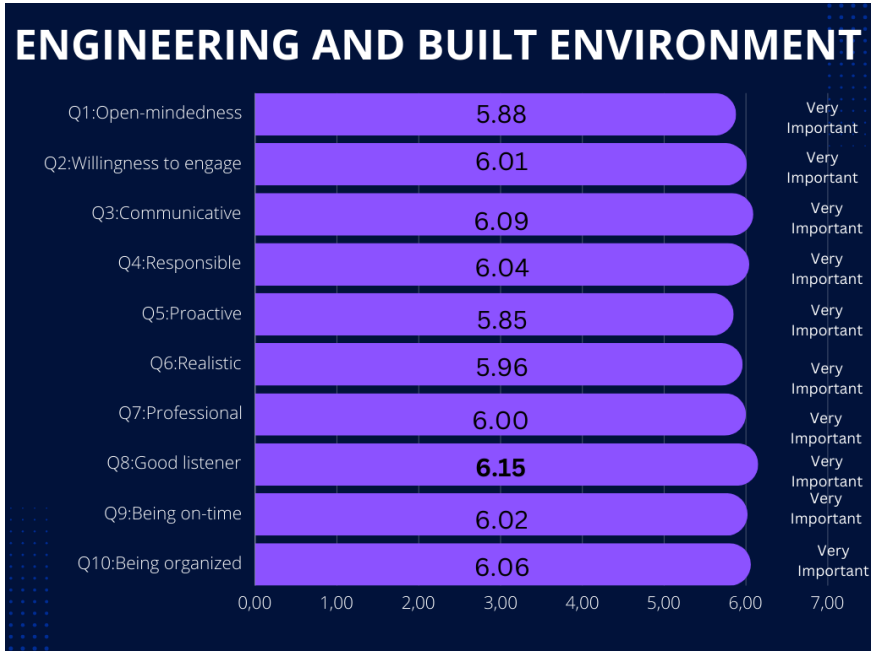


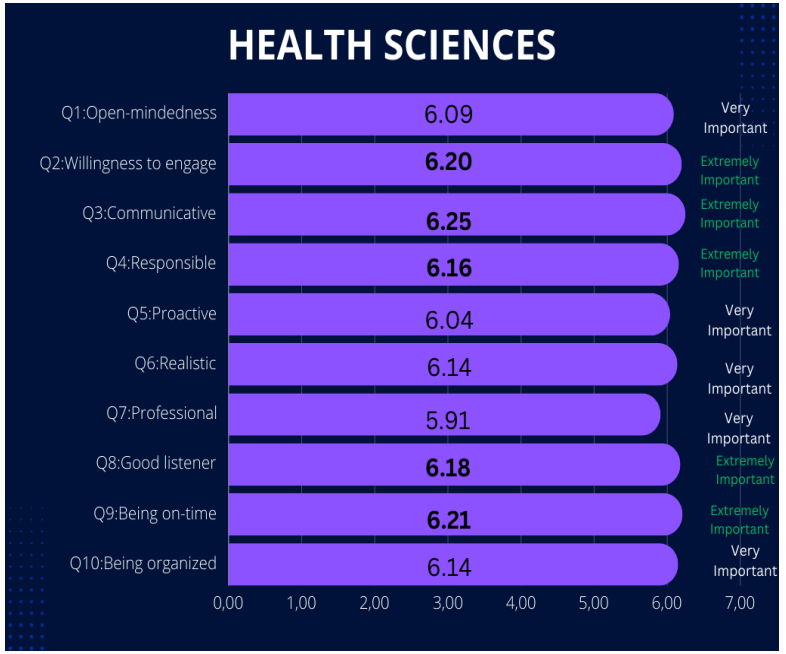


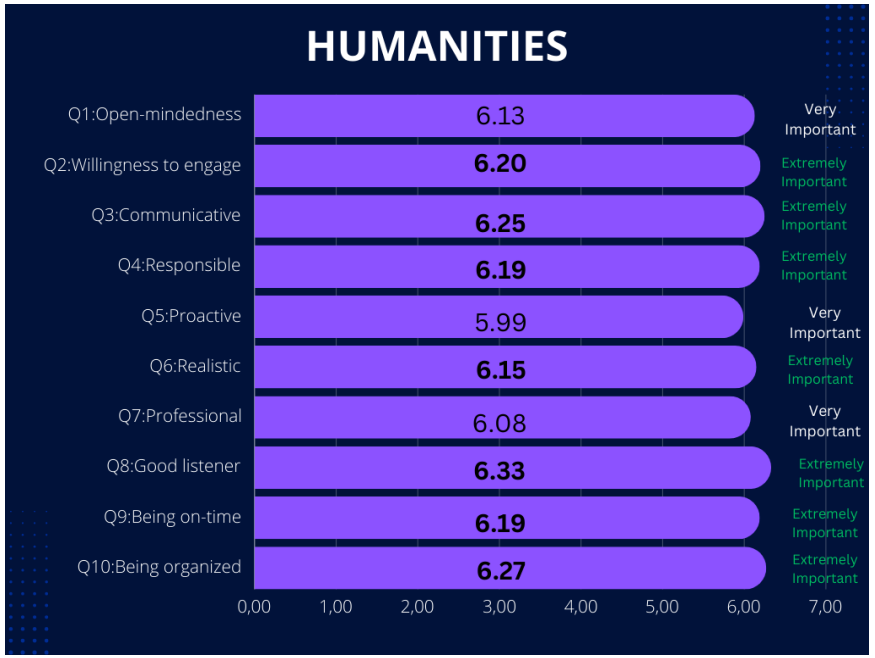


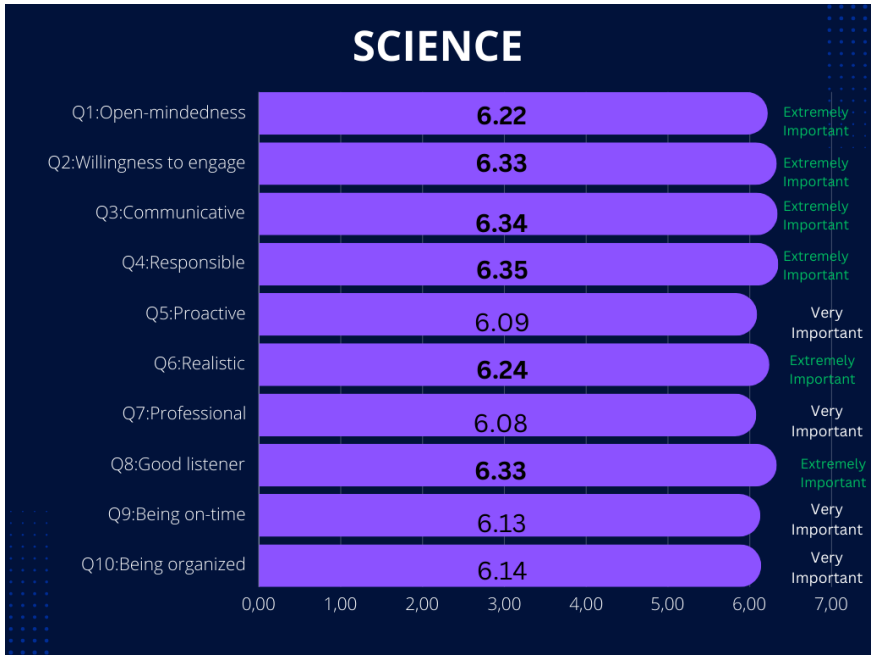
Faculty analysis: Importance of Mentee Qualities











Conclusion: Understanding Student Mentorability in First-Year Participation

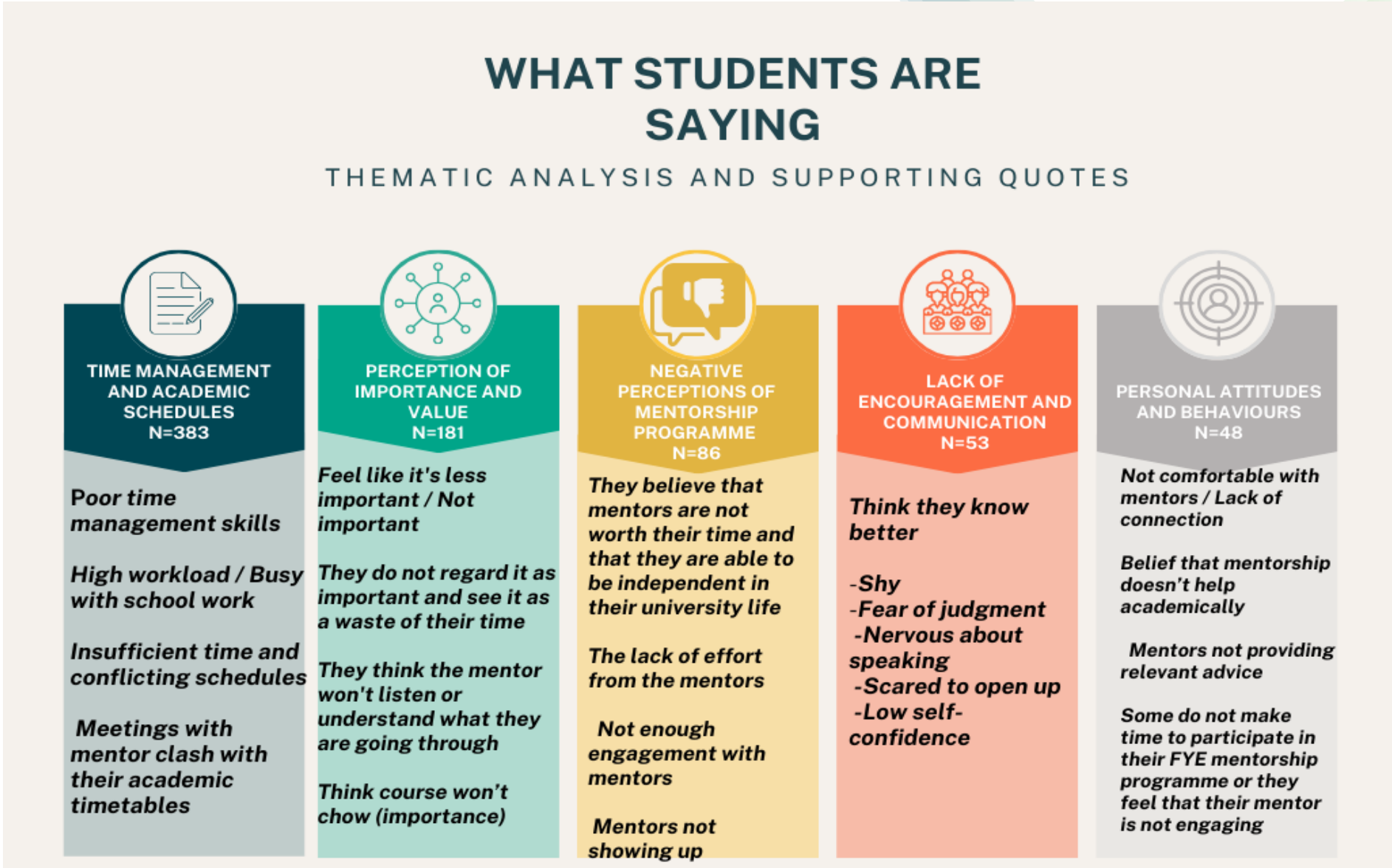
- This study aimed to understand students' predisposition and ability to be mentorable
- The findings indicate that this sample of Wits students are highly mentorable and see the mentor as a resource to help them in navigating the transition specific to their faculty and discipline areas.
- Social engagement is not as valued in mentoring relationships.
- Social engagement - External factors like the COVID-19 pandemic can further influence how mentees perceive mentorability. Due to impact of COVID on social engagements, these students did not get the opportunity to learn the value of social connections. Coming into university this could have persisted as argued by Crespí & López (2023).
- Easy to conflate mentoring support with academic tutoring but a mentor is a step ahead in the transitional space. *It's the guide by the side*

Conclusion: Understanding Student Mentorability in First-Year Participation

- As a follow-up to the students who showed a lack of interest in participating in the FYE mentorship programme, the researchers asked the students that completed the survey to share their thoughts as to why they think their fellow students may not be interested in participating in the FYE mentorship programme. Below is the thematic representation of their responses:
  - Time management and academic schedules (383)
  - Perception of importance and value (181)
  - Negative perceptions of mentorship programme (86)
  - Lack of encouragement and communication (53)
  - Personal attitudes and behaviours (48)
  - Quality of mentorship (31)
  - Overwhelmed by academic workload (22)
  - Difficulty in social interactions (6)
  - Initial adjustment to university life (4)
  - General lack of interest (2)
  - Other (18)

Conclusion: Understanding Student Mentorability in First-Year Participation

We have identified several critical themes that provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to engagement. These themes, derived from student insights, offer valuable perspectives that can guide the development of more effective mentorship initiatives.



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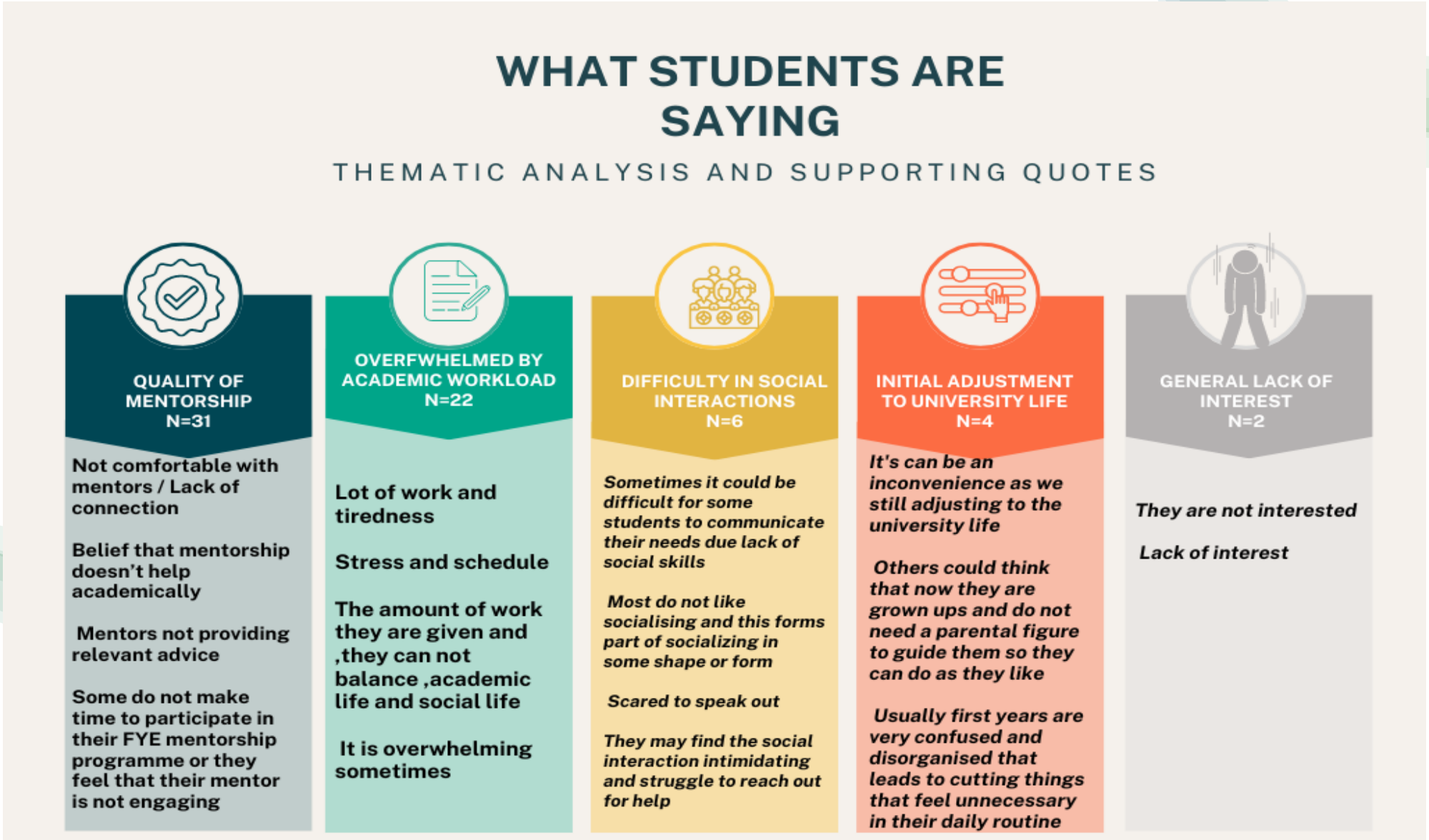

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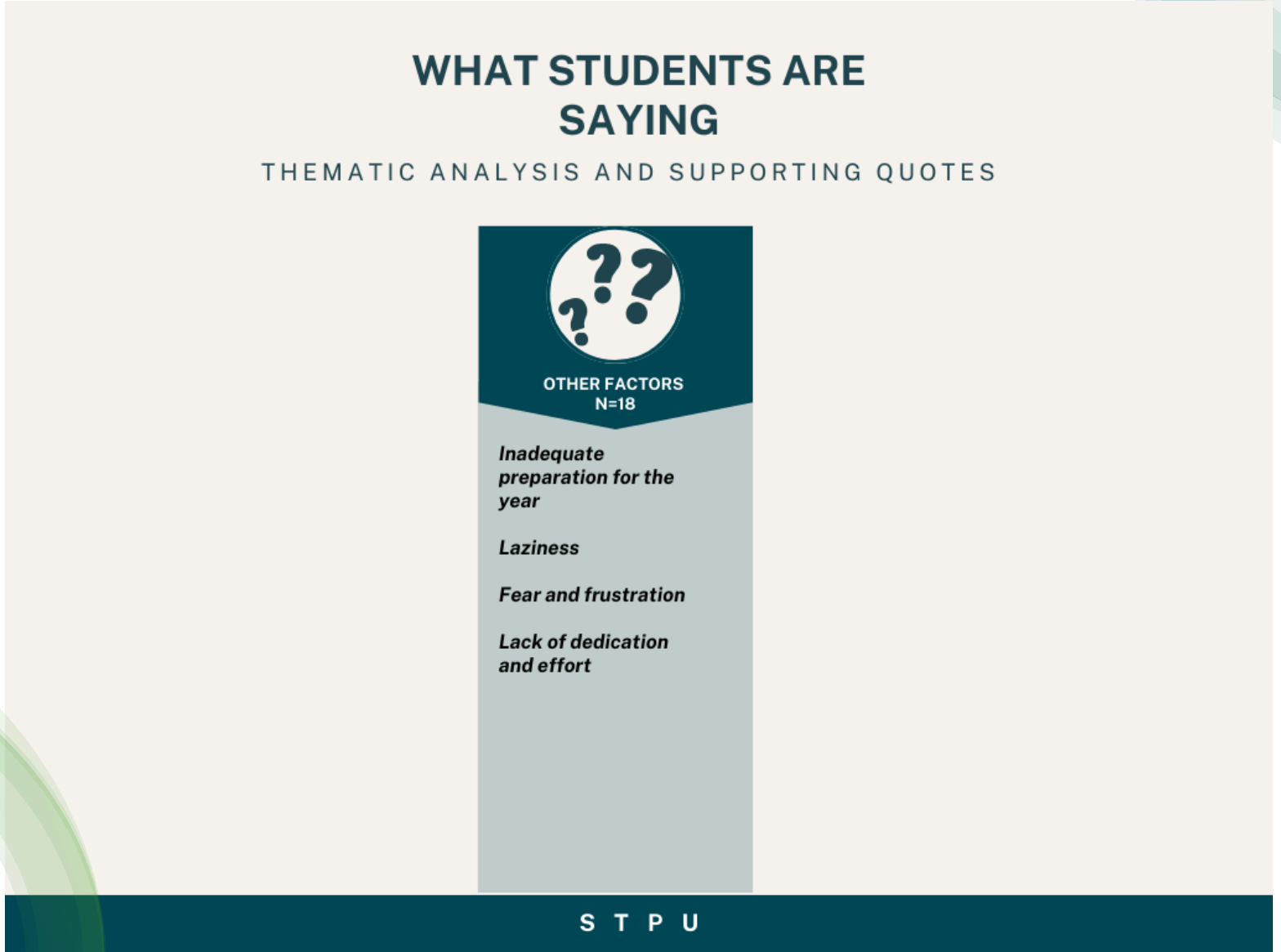

Recommendation for future studies

- Administer mentorability scale to all first-year students before they access the University.
- Future studies will explore whether:
  - Self-perceptions of mentorability is correlated with single semester and one-year retention rates.
- Include inferential statistics to measure the significance of the differences observed in the descriptive findings.

By creating a supportive, flexible, and engaging mentorship environment, universities can significantly enhance the first-year experience, leading to improved student outcomes and a stronger academic community.

THANK YOU
for your
ATTENTION!

Any Questions?