

Pre-entry Peer Mentoring and Mentor Intention: Mentoring Usefulness and Workload Feasibility

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Abstract

Pre-matriculation transition support is increasingly treated as a design problem rather than a brief orientation event, yet sustainable pre-entry peer mentoring depends partly on whether participants later wish to mentor. Framed by transition pedagogy and informed by the theory of planned behavior, this secondary analysis examined mentor intention in a 10-week online pre-entry program at Kanda University of International Studies, Japan. The analytic frame comprised incoming students in departments where mentoring was embedded ($N = 330$; complete-case logistic models $n = 308$). Students evaluated the program favorably ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.50$). Perceived mentoring usefulness was positively associated with intention to serve as a mentor the following year ($OR = 1.76$, 95% CI [1.17, 2.63]); perceived weekly workload showed a weaker, less consistent association. Open-ended comments identified redesign levers around workload pacing, expectation clarity, and mentor responsiveness.

Keywords: peer mentoring; mentor intention; pre-entry transition; transition pedagogy; mentoring usefulness; workload feasibility

Introduction

Transition into higher education begins before the first week of classes. Recent transition-pedagogy work has strengthened the view that commencement support should be designed as a coherent, institution-wide learning experience rather than treated as a short orientation event or a set of optional add-ons (Kift, 2009, 2025; Naylor & Marrington, 2025). Current first-year research likewise emphasizes care, belonging, and relationship-rich welcome as central to students' early engagement with university life (Leonard et al., 2024; Picton & Baik, 2024). In this framing, pre-entry support matters because students often begin forming expectations, routines, and help-seeking habits before formal matriculation. Pre-arrival support can help students feel that “the wheels [are] moving” before arrival, especially when it reduces uncertainty and provides a clearer sense of how to begin participating (Timmis et al., 2024).

In Japan, this early period can be substantial. Students often receive offers of admission months before the April start of the academic year, and many universities provide pre-enrollment tasks intended to maintain motivation and bridge the transition from secondary to tertiary study. A Japanese example of pre-enrollment education shows how this interval can be used to scaffold study habits, provide asynchronous academic work, and maintain continuity between admission and entry (Hirai et al., 2022). The format is frequently online and platform-based, which makes it scalable, but also risks reducing transition support to task completion unless it is paired with relational forms of guidance.



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Peer mentoring is one plausible way to humanise the pre-entry period. Near-peers can answer questions that students may hesitate to ask staff, normalize uncertainty, and make institutional expectations feel more legible. However, there is also a critical caution in the literature: pre-entry initiatives can slide into responsabilizing students if they implicitly treat readiness as an individual problem to be fixed rather than as an institutional design problem to be addressed (Baker et al., 2024; Berg, 2020; O'Shea, 2020). The same caution applies to peer mentoring. Mentors can enrich the transition ecology, but they should not become a substitute for coherent institutional support.

Most peer-mentoring evaluations still focus primarily on mentee-side outcomes such as belonging, adjustment, satisfaction, or persistence (Gehreke et al., 2024; Le et al., 2024). Those outcomes are important, but they do not answer a practical sustainability question: what makes participants willing to return as mentors in the next cycle? In pre-entry programs this question matters because mentoring is front-loaded into a busy time, and future mentor supply depends on whether students judge the role to be both valuable and feasible. The present study addresses that gap by examining mentor intention as a sustainability-oriented outcome in a 10-week online pre-entry program at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in Chiba, Japan. Drawing on transition pedagogy and a Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)-informed value-and-feasibility lens, the study combines survey results and open-ended comments to identify design signals that can inform program revision.

Literature Review

Pre-entry transition as a designed and contested educational space

Transition pedagogy has long argued that universities should design commencement as a coordinated educational process. The framework's more recent reinterpretations keep that emphasis but sharpen its equity and institutional-responsibility dimensions, arguing for coherence, inclusive curriculum design, and whole-of-institution support rather than isolated interventions (Kift, 2025; Naylor & Marrington, 2025). Related work in Australasian first-year research similarly stresses that early student support should be caring, contextualized, and relationship-rich rather than merely informational (Leonard et al., 2024; Picton & Baik, 2024).

At the same time, critical scholarship cautions that transition discourse can unintentionally reproduce deficit assumptions. Baker et al. (2024) argue that institutions should resist requiring students to "fit in" to inherited structures and instead build responsive, wrap-around support ecosystems. O'Shea (2020) likewise shows that students crossing into higher education often navigate structural boundaries rather than simply overcoming personal deficits, while Berg (2020) illustrates how institutional norms can define an assumed "fit" student and thereby shift attention away from structural barriers. These critiques matter for pre-entry work because the pre-matriculation period can be framed either as a space in which universities take responsibility for reducing uncertainty or as a space in which students are expected to prove that they are already university-ready.

In the present study, pre-entry mentoring is therefore treated as one design layer within a broader support ecology. The analytical implication is important: mentoring should not be evaluated only in terms of whether students individually adapt, but also in terms of whether the mentoring design supports accessible, low-stakes participation without displacing institutional accountability.

Peer mentoring in pre-entry transition

Peer mentoring is well established as a transition strategy in higher education, but recent reviews emphasize that its effects depend on design quality. A systematic review of peer mentoring in the study-entry phase found generally positive effects for psychosocial and academic adjustment, while also noting substantial variation in implementation, role definition, and outcome quality across programs (Gehreke et al., 2024). A broader systematic review likewise concluded that peer mentoring can support emotional, social, and academic development, but that benefits are shaped by context, program structure, and the nature of interaction between peers (Le et al., 2024).

For first-year and transition contexts, mentoring is often valued because it offers psychologically accessible support. Lane (2020) argues that peer mentoring can be especially helpful during stressful early periods when students are reluctant to seek formal help. van der Velden et al. (2023) similarly position peer mentoring as a mechanism for inclusion and belonging. In a pre-entry setting, that logic is amplified: students have not yet developed stable campus routines or informal networks, so the threshold for asking questions may be particularly high.

However, the literature also shows that peer mentoring does not work well when roles are vague or relational expectations are unbounded. Egege and Kutieleh (2015) argue that mentoring requires boundaries, precisely because unclear expectations can

blur the difference between collegial guidance, quasi-counselling, and administrative troubleshooting. Brown and Chartier's (2025) mixed-methods evaluation similarly found value for both mentees and mentors, but also reported calls for smaller mentor-to-mentee ratios and more time, underscoring that perceived helpfulness and perceived strain can coexist. This point is especially relevant for online pre-entry programs, where asynchronous messaging can make mentor availability feel continuous unless communication norms are clearly structured.

Mentor sustainability and a TPB-informed lens

Although the benefits of mentoring for newcomers are well-documented, the sustainability of mentoring from the mentor side remains underexamined. Mentors often report gains in leadership, communication, and reflection, but they may also encounter ambiguity, emotional labour, and role strain (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Leavitt et al., 2022; Seery et al., 2021). For program leaders, the crucial issue is not simply whether mentors can gain from the role, but whether participants perceive that role as worth taking on in a future cycle.

The theory of planned behavior offers a useful but necessarily partial lens for that question. Ajzen (1991) conceptualizes intention as the proximal antecedent of behaviour, shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In mentoring research, TPB has been used to explain students' intention to engage in mentoring relationships, showing that evaluative judgments and perceived ability can help explain willingness to participate (Huart et al., 2023). The present study does not test the full TPB model because the routine evaluation survey did not measure subjective norms. Instead, it uses a TPB-informed application: perceived mentoring usefulness is treated as an attitudinal signal, while perceived workload functions as a feasibility or perceived-control signal. This partial application is defensible because the practical question here concerns whether students view mentoring as sufficiently valuable and manageable to imagine taking it up later.

From this perspective, mentor intention should not be understood as a fixed trait, nor assumed to be fully malleable. It is better conceptualized as partly responsive to program experience and therefore potentially shaped by design. If students experience mentoring as useful, bounded, and feasible, programs may be better positioned to renew their mentor pipeline. If they experience the role as diffuse, unpredictable, or overly burdensome, sustainability is likely to weaken even when mentoring is otherwise valued.

Research questions

Taken together, the literature suggests three relevant points. First, pre-entry transition is an educational space that should be designed with institutional accountability, not framed as a simple test of student readiness. Second, peer mentoring appears promising in this space because it can lower the social threshold for participation, but its effectiveness and sustainability depend on role clarity and implementation quality. Third, mentor intention is a meaningful sustainability outcome, and a TPB-informed lens provides a pragmatic rationale for examining value and feasibility signals even when a full TPB test is not possible.

The present study addresses these issues through the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1. What program elements do participants perceive as most helpful for their transition to university?

RQ2. To what extent do perceived mentoring usefulness and workload perceptions predict intention to serve as a mentor in the following year?

RQ3. What redesign levers emerge from open-ended comments about the overall program and the mentoring component, and how do they align with the quantitative patterns in mentoring usefulness and workload?

Method

National and institutional context

This study reports a secondary analysis of an end-of-program evaluation survey administered after a 10-week online pre-entry program for newly admitted students at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in Chiba, Japan. The institutional setting is a language- and internationally oriented private university comprising 11 departments represented in the mentoring-embedded program frame. In Japan, universities commonly use the interval between admission and April matriculation for pre-enrollment education intended to support motivation, study habits, and transition preparedness (Hirai et al., 2022). The focal program reflects that broader national pattern.

Available program documentation identifies two immediate aims: supporting academic readiness and easing social acclimation before matriculation. The archived evaluation records available for this secondary analysis do not identify a single precipitating institutional problem such as a documented spike in attrition, and we therefore describe the program as a routine transition-support initiative rather than as a targeted remedy for one specific crisis. That distinction matters because the current analysis is concerned with design quality and sustainability inside an established institutional practice.

Program design and departmental variation

The program combined common weekly academic tasks with structured peer support. Across departments, students completed a shared English component. Departments could also add tasks such as reading, newspaper-scrap assignments, report writing, Japanese-language tasks, or special English tasks. The mentoring component comprised a mentor system and group mentoring meetings. In practice, this meant that the mentoring-eligible frame was broader than students who necessarily used mentoring intensively; the analytic frame is therefore best understood as students in departments where mentoring was available and embedded in the program design.

Department-level variation mattered in two ways. First, it produced different task bundles across majors. Second, it generated structural missingness for some survey items because only students assigned specific departmental components could evaluate those components. To address this heterogeneity, department was retained as a fixed effect in the regression models.

Participants, timing, and data sources

According to the Academic Success Center roster, 381 incoming first-year students in departments where peer mentoring was embedded were invited to complete the post-program survey. A total of 330 responses were received, yielding an 86.6% response rate. The mentor-intention item was completed by 316 respondents, the two-item mentoring-usefulness index could be computed for 322 respondents, and the primary regression models used 308 complete cases.

Respondents were drawn from all 11 mentoring-embedded departments. The largest respondent groups were English ($n = 147$), Spanish ($n = 40$), and Global Liberal Arts ($n = 28$), with smaller numbers from the remaining departments. Because the de-identified archived evaluation extract did not retain age and gender variables, the sample description in this paper is limited to response rate, departmental coverage, and the mentoring-eligible institutional frame. Representativeness can therefore be discussed in relation to the mentoring-embedded intake rather than the wider university population.

The survey was administered in the final week of the 10-week program, immediately before matriculation. Exact calendar dates were not preserved in the de-identified evaluation file used for the present analysis, and this constraint is acknowledged as a limitation.

The Academic Success Center administered the survey as part of routine quality-improvement activity. For the present secondary analysis, data were analyzed in de-identified form and reported only in aggregate. Students were informed that participation was voluntary and that responses would not affect their academic performance. Given the minimal-risk evaluation context, the activity was not submitted for formal institutional ethics review.

Measures

Future mentor intention (outcome) was measured using a binary item asking whether students would like to participate as a mentor in the following year if given the opportunity (yes/no). Perceived workload (primary feasibility signal) was measured using a five-category item ranging from “too little” to “too much.” For the primary models, workload was collapsed into Low (“too little” or “slightly too little”), Adequate, and High (“somewhat heavy” or “too much”) to support interpretability and reduce sparsity. Appendix B reports a sensitivity analysis using the original five-level coding.

Mentoring usefulness (primary value signal) was operationalized as a two-item index averaging perceived usefulness of the mentoring system and group mentoring meetings on a four-point agreement scale. The two-item index showed high internal consistency ($r = .76$; $\alpha = .87$). Overall program usefulness, program-length evaluation, and task-specific helpfulness items were used descriptively for RQ1.

Open-ended responses were used for redesign-oriented qualitative analysis. The most informative prompts were requests for improvement to the overall program and critiques of the mentoring component. Survey items were administered in Japanese; Appendix A provides English translations of the focal item wording and coding.

Analytic strategy

Descriptive analyses for RQ1 used the full mentoring-eligible respondent frame ($N = 330$). RQ2 was addressed using logistic regression models predicting mentor intention. Model 1 included workload categories and department fixed effects. Model 2, treated as the primary specification, added the mentoring-usefulness index. Model 3 added usefulness $\times$ workload interactions to test whether the usefulness–intention association differed across workload groups.

The use of controls was deliberately parsimonious. Department fixed effects were included because program implementation and task bundles varied across majors. Additional demographic controls were not available in the de-identified evaluation extract. Task-specific workload variables were not entered because they were structurally missing for students who were not assigned those components. Overall program usefulness was also not used as a control in the primary models because it showed a strong ceiling pattern and would have added limited discriminating information while overlapping conceptually with the design experience under study. The main models, therefore, prioritize comparability and transparent interpretation over maximal adjustment.

For RQ3, open-ended comments were summarized using a keyword-informed scan followed by manual review. Each substantive comment was assigned to one primary redesign theme (e.g., workload/pacing, mentor access/responsiveness, clarity/feedback). Because the comments were brief and collected for evaluation rather than in-depth interviewing, this procedure is best understood as a descriptive redesign analysis rather than a full thematic study.

Results

Program evaluations and workload perceptions

Descriptive summaries for RQ1 used the full mentoring-eligible sample ($N = 330$). Mentor-intention responses were available for 316 respondents, and the primary regression models used 308 complete cases. Table 1 shows that students evaluated the program highly overall, with strong ratings for the mentoring system and group mentoring meetings as well.

Program length was generally judged appropriate: 89.4% selected “just right,” compared with 10.0% selecting “too long” and 0.6% selecting “too short” (Table 2). For weekly study volume, 70.6% reported an adequate workload, 24.2% reported a somewhat heavy or too-heavy workload, and 5.1% reported a slightly too little or too-little workload. Reading tasks were more often perceived as heavy than the overall weekly workload, whereas newspaper-scrap work was more often seen as adequate among students assigned that component.

Table 1

Usefulness Ratings for the Program and Mentoring Components

Measure	Scale	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Top-two agreement (%)
Overall program usefulness	1–4	330	3.73	0.50	98.2
Mentoring usefulness index (system and group meeting)	1–4	322	3.54	0.74	87.0
Mentoring system usefulness	1–4	330	3.58	0.74	91.8
Group mentoring meeting usefulness	1–4	322	3.50	0.83	86.6

Note. The usefulness items were measured on a 4-point agreement scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). The mentoring usefulness index is the average of the mentoring system and group meeting items (two-item index; $r = .76$; $\alpha = .87$; computed for respondents with both items). “Top-two agreement” indicates the proportion selecting 3 (“somewhat agree”) or 4 (“strongly agree”).

Table 2*Perceived Workload and Program Length (N = 330)*

Item	Response category	<i>n</i>	%
Program length (10 weeks)	Too short	2	0.6
	Just right	295	89.4
	Too long	33	10.0
Weekly workload	Too little	1	0.3
	Slightly too little	16	4.8
	Adequate	233	70.6
	Somewhat heavy	71	21.5
	Too much	9	2.7
Reading workload	Too little	1	0.3
	Slightly too little	2	0.6
	Adequate	191	57.9
	Somewhat heavy	115	34.8
	Too much	21	6.4
Newspaper scrap workload	Slightly too little	4	1.4
	Adequate	204	73.9
	Somewhat heavy	58	21.0
	Too much	10	3.6

Note. The newspaper scrap workload was reported only by respondents who were assigned to that component ($n = 276$).

Helpful program elements

When asked to select tasks or components that were particularly helpful, respondents most often chose the common English tasks (90.3%). Substantial minorities selected newspaper scrap tasks (45.5%, among the full sample with departmental eligibility variation) and reading tasks (38.8%). Within the English component, grammar was selected most often, followed by listening and reading comprehension (Table 3). These results indicate that students especially valued structured, clearly bounded academic tasks, although the more actionable redesign signals emerged from comments about pacing and mentor responsiveness rather than from the helpfulness rankings alone.

Table 3*Tasks Selected as “Particularly Helpful”*

Task/component	<i>n</i>	% of total sample (N = 330)
English tasks	298	90.3
Reading tasks	128	38.8
Newspaper scrap tasks	150	45.5
Within English tasks		
Grammar	248	75.2
Listening	182	55.2
Reading comprehension	145	43.9

Note. Items were “select all that apply,” so percentages do not sum to 100%.

Predicting mentor intention

Among respondents who answered the mentor-intention item, 52.5% reported that they would like to serve as a mentor in the following year. Table 4 shows that this proportion varied across departments, but department was treated in the regression models as an adjustment factor rather than as a focal substantive comparison.

Table 5 presents the logistic regression results. In the primary model (Model 2), a one-point increase on the 1–4 mentoring-usefulness index was associated with higher odds of intending to mentor (OR = 1.76, 95% CI [1.17, 2.63]) after adjustment for workload and department. Compared with an adequate workload, high workload showed a small negative association that did not reach conventional significance levels (OR = 0.75, 95% CI [0.43, 1.32]). The interaction model did not provide clear evidence that the usefulness–intention association differed across workload groups.

Model performance was modest (AUC = 0.65–0.68; McFadden pseudo R^2 = 0.05–0.07). These values indicate that mentoring usefulness and workload provide meaningful but incomplete explanatory leverage. In other words, the models identify design-relevant signals rather than a comprehensive account of mentor intention. Appendix B shows that the positive usefulness association remained visible in sensitivity analyses using a five-level workload specification, cluster-robust standard errors by department, and a specification entering the two mentoring items separately.

Figure 1 translates the primary model into predicted probabilities. Across workload groups, the estimated probability of intending to mentor increased as mentoring usefulness increased. The workload differences were comparatively modest in the primary specification, consistent with the weaker and less stable independent association of workload after accounting for mentoring usefulness and department effects.

Table 4

Participants by Major/Department and Mentor Intention

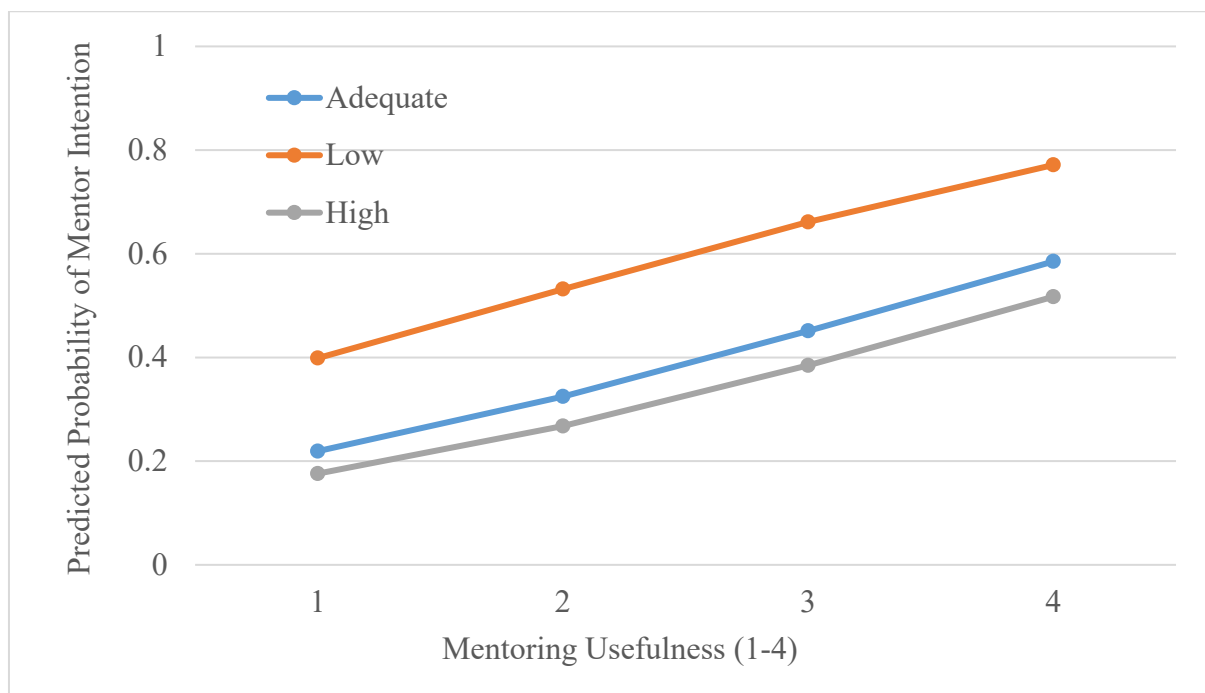
Major/department	<i>n</i>	Mentor intention responses (<i>n</i>)	Yes (<i>n</i>)	Yes (%)
International Communication	27	21	11	52.4
English	147	145	67	46.2
Chinese	29	29	14	48.3
Spanish	40	36	23	63.9
Brazilian Portuguese	9	9	6	66.7
Korean	9	9	4	44.4
Indonesian	14	14	5	35.7
Vietnamese	11	11	7	63.6
Thai	9	8	7	87.5
Global Liberal Arts	28	27	19	70.4
International Business Career	7	7	3	42.9
Total	330	316	166	52.5

Note. Percentages are computed among those who answered the mentor intention item within each major.

Table 5*Logistic Regression Predicting Mentor Intention*

Predictor	Model 1 OR [95% CI]	Model 2 OR [95% CI]	Model 3 OR [95% CI]
Mentoring usefulness index (1–4), at Adequate workload	—	1.76 [1.17, 2.63]	1.96 [1.17, 3.27]
Workload: Low vs. Adequate	2.03 [0.68, 6.05]	2.46 [0.79, 7.68]	4.06 [0.10, 165.76]
Workload: High vs. Adequate	0.68 [0.39, 1.18]	0.75 [0.43, 1.32]	2.31 [0.12, 46.01]
Mentoring usefulness × Low workload	—	—	0.87 [0.28, 2.65]
Mentoring usefulness × High workload	—	—	0.73 [0.32, 1.67]
<i>n</i>	308	308	308
AUC	0.65	0.67	0.68
McFadden pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.05	0.07	0.07

Note. Odds ratios (ORs) are reported with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). All models include department fixed effects. In Model 3, the mentoring usefulness coefficient represents the conditional association within the reference workload category (Adequate); the interaction terms indicate how this association differs for the Low and High workload groups.

Figure 1*Predicted Probabilities of Mentor Intention by Mentoring Usefulness and Perceived Weekly Workload (Model 2)*

Open-ended redesign levers

Two open-ended prompts were especially informative for redesign: requests for improvements to the overall program ($n = 69$ substantive comments) and critiques of the mentoring component ($n = 62$ substantive comments). Table 6 summarizes the resulting primary-theme assignments.

Among improvement requests, workload/pacing was by far the most common coded theme (25 of 69 comments, 36.2%). These comments clustered around the amount, sequencing, and legibility of weekly work rather than around rejection of the program itself. Materials/access and mentor access/responsiveness each accounted for 7 comments (10.1%). Clarity/feedback/answer quality was less frequent but still present, suggesting that some students wanted more explicit guidance about what was expected and how their work or questions would be handled.

Among mentoring critiques, mentor access/responsiveness was the largest recurring theme (8 of 62 comments, 12.9%). Workload/pacing and interaction/speaking/community each accounted for 4 comments (6.5%), followed by technology/procedures (2 comments, 3.2%). Substantively, these patterns suggest that students valued mentoring most when it was timely, reachable, and interactionally predictable. The relatively large Other/uncategorized group reflects the brevity and heterogeneity of many comments, including idiosyncratic suggestions and short remarks that did not cohere into a recurring redesign theme.

Table 6

Redesign Levers in Open-Ended Comments

Category	Q10 improvement requests ($n = 69$)	Q2–Q5 mentoring critiques ($n = 62$)
Mentor access/responsiveness	7	8
Materials/access	7	0
Workload/pacing	25	4
Interaction/speaking/community	1	4
Clarity/feedback/answer quality	4	0
Technology/procedures	1	2
Other/uncategorized	24	44

Note. A keyword-informed scan was used to flag candidate comments for each theme, followed by manual review to confirm thematic fit. Each substantive comment was assigned to one primary theme. Comments that did not align with a recurring theme were coded as Other/uncategorized to retain transparent denominators.

Discussion

This study asked what makes participants in a pre-entry program willing to imagine returning as mentors. The clearest answer is that mentor intention was more strongly associated with perceived mentoring usefulness than with overall workload, while the open-ended comments suggest that this usefulness was experienced through responsiveness, clarity, and predictable boundaries. Read together, the findings indicate that sustainable pre-entry peer mentoring depends less on asking students to shoulder more responsibility than on designing mentoring as a useful, bounded, and institutionally supported role.

This interpretation reinforces transition-pedagogy arguments that pre-entry transition should be treated as a coherent educational space rather than as a short orientation add-on. The generally positive evaluations of the program and its mentoring components are consistent with recent work that emphasizes relationship-rich, caring, and institutionally coordinated early support (Kift, 2025; Leonard et al., 2024; Naylor & Marrington, 2025; Picton & Baik, 2024). In the Japanese context, where the interval between admission and April entry can be lengthy, the results suggest that online pre-entry structures can help make participation more legible before arrival, but only when academic tasks are paired with accessible human support.

The study's specific contribution is sustainability-focused rather than merely descriptive. Recent reviews show that peer mentoring can support mentee adjustment and engagement, but they say less about what may renew the future mentor pipeline

in pre-entry settings (Gehreke et al., 2024; Le et al., 2024). In the present data, mentoring usefulness was a more consistent predictor of mentor intention than global workload perception. Interpreted through the study's TPB-informed lens, this suggests that the value signal captured by students' evaluative judgments about mentoring may be more discriminating than the feasibility signal captured by a broad workload item. This reading is compatible with TPB-based mentoring research that treats intention as responsive to evaluative and control-related judgments, even though the present study operationalized those constructs only partially (Huart et al., 2023).

That pattern, however, should be interpreted proportionately. Workload was not irrelevant; its association with mentor intention was weaker, coding-sensitive, and less stable, and the interaction model did not show clear evidence that the usefulness–intention relationship differed across workload groups. The modest pseudo R^2 values point in the same direction. The models identify design-relevant signals, but they explain only a limited share of the variance in mentor intention, which is likely also shaped by factors not measured here, such as subjective norms, perceived competence, prior volunteering orientation, time constraints outside the program, and the quality of particular mentor interactions. For that reason, the present study is best read as a pragmatic, partial TPB application rather than as a full test of the theory.

The open-ended comments help explain what students may have bundled into “usefulness.” Students did not simply ask for more mentoring in the abstract. They most often pointed to timely responses, clarity about expectations, predictable access to mentors, and more legible pacing of weekly tasks. These themes align with mentoring research showing that relationship quality depends not only on goodwill, but also on structured expectations, manageable ratios, and clearly bounded roles (Brown & Chartier, 2025; Egege & Kutieleh, 2015). The qualitative results also clarify that workload was experienced not merely as the number of hours required, but as sequencing, predictability, and the ease with which students could understand what to do next.

A further implication follows from critical transition scholarship. The practical lesson is not that institutions should outsource transition support to peers, or that students should simply become more self-managing before arrival. Rather, peer mentoring appears most sustainable when it sits within a broader support ecology that includes timely staff communication, coherent task design, and clear escalation routes for issues mentors should not carry alone (Baker et al., 2024; Berg, 2020; O'Shea, 2020). Three redesign implications follow directly from that interpretation. First, programs should reduce variation in mentoring experience by setting explicit response-time norms and standard communication channels, especially in the early weeks when uncertainty is highest. Second, weekly demands should be made more legible through pacing adjustments, shorter task bundles where needed, and clearer explanations of purpose, because students' comments suggest that strain was produced as much by sequencing and predictability as by sheer volume. Third, mentor roles should remain bounded through training and supervision that clarify what mentors are expected to answer, what should be escalated to staff, and how group interactions should be organized.

Taken together, the study does not support viewing mentor intention as a fixed disposition or as wholly determined by program design. Instead, mentor intention appears partly responsive to program experience and, therefore, open to institutional influence, within clear contextual and measurement limits. The paper's contribution is to position mentor intention as a sustainability outcome in pre-entry peer mentoring and to show that this outcome is likely to be strengthened not by asking more of students, but by making mentoring more useful, more predictable, and more clearly bounded within a broader support ecology.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations constrain the interpretation of the study. First, the data are cross-sectional and self-reported, so causal inference is not warranted. Second, the study is based on one institution and one program design, which limits generalizability. Third, intention is not the same as subsequent mentor uptake or retention. Fourth, the de-identified archived evaluation extract did not retain age, gender, or exact survey dates, which restricted the sample description and prevented demographic controls. Fifth, the open-ended comments were brief and redesign-oriented; they offer useful program signals but not the depth of interview-based qualitative work.

Future research could strengthen the evidence base by linking intention to later mentor participation, measuring fuller TPB constructs including subjective norms and self-efficacy, and testing targeted redesigns such as response-time protocols, smaller communication groups, or alternative workload pacing. A more detailed qualitative study could also distinguish between different kinds of pre-entry concerns—procedural, academic, and relational—and examine how these map onto willingness to mentor.

Conclusion

Pre-entry peer mentoring is usually justified in terms of what it does for incoming students. This study adds a complementary sustainability perspective by asking what makes those students willing to return as mentors themselves. In this 10-week online pre-entry program, the usefulness of mentoring showed a clearer association with future mentor intention than perceived workload, while open-ended comments highlighted specific redesign levers around pacing, expectations, and responsiveness.

The practical implication is straightforward but important. Institutions may strengthen their mentor pipeline not by asking more of students, but by making the mentoring system more consistently useful, more predictable, and more clearly bounded within a broader support ecology. That conclusion keeps the focus where transition pedagogy places it: on the design of educational conditions, not only on the dispositions of individual students.

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Appendix A

Survey Item Wording and Coding (English Translations)

Construct	Operationalization
Future mentor intention	Would you like to participate as a mentor in the program in a subsequent year if given the opportunity? Response options: Yes/No. Coding: Yes = 1, No = 0.
Perceived workload	How did you feel about the weekly study volume? Five categories from “too little” to “too much.” Coding: 1–5, with higher scores indicating heavier workload.
Overall program usefulness	Overall, the program was useful for my preparation. Four-point agreement scale; higher scores indicate more favourable evaluations.
Mentoring system usefulness	The mentoring system was useful for my preparation. Four-point agreement scale where mentoring was available/used; higher scores indicate more favourable evaluations.
Group mentoring meeting usefulness	Group mentoring meetings were useful for my preparation. Four-point agreement scale where meetings were available/attended; higher scores indicate more favourable evaluations.
Program duration evaluation	How did you feel about the program length? Response options: Too short / Just right / Too long, followed by an open-ended explanation. Used descriptively.
Open-ended redesign signals	Open prompts asking about helpful and difficult aspects of the program and suggestions for improvement. Used for descriptive redesign-oriented coding.
Department	Academic department/major. Used as a fixed effect to adjust for differences in program implementation and task bundles.

Note. The survey was administered in Japanese. The wording above is provided as an English translation to clarify measurement and coding; the original item text is available from the author upon request.

Appendix B

Supplementary Analyses

Table B1

Sensitivity Model Using Five-Level Workload Coding

Predictor	Estimate
Mentoring usefulness index (1–4)	1.70 [1.14, 2.53]
Weekly workload (per 1-category increase; 1 = too little to 5 = too much)	0.65 [0.43, 0.98]
<i>n</i>	308
AUC	0.67
McFadden pseudo R^2	0.07

Note. Workload was entered as a linear 1–5 predictor, where 1 = too little and 5 = too much.

Table B2*Primary Model with Cluster-Robust Standard Errors by Department*

Predictor	Estimate
Mentoring usefulness index (1–4)	1.76 [1.32, 2.34]
Workload: Low vs. Adequate	2.46 [0.77, 7.84]
Workload: High vs. Adequate	0.75 [0.49, 1.14]
<i>n</i>	308
AUC	0.67
McFadden pseudo R^2	0.07

Table B3*Alternative Specification Entering the Two Mentoring Items Separately*

Predictor	Estimate
Mentoring system usefulness (1–4)	1.50 [0.89, 2.54]
Group mentoring meeting usefulness (1–4)	1.20 [0.77, 1.86]
Workload: Low vs. Adequate	2.46 [0.79, 7.68]
Workload: High vs. Adequate	0.75 [0.43, 1.32]
<i>n</i>	308
AUC	0.67
McFadden pseudo R^2	0.07

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