

*Major Highlights and Conclusions*

- Students joined DEAP for a combination of social and academic opportunities—they wanted to develop strong relationships while also gaining tools to succeed in college.
- DEAP is a close community, and is described as a “safe haven,” a “family,” & a “home away from home.”
- DEAP encourages students to overcome racial barriers and “approach certain situations with a stronger mind.”
- Having close, individualized relationships with advisors and mentors is extremely valued by DEAP students.
- Faculty/staff mentors were well liked by those who used them, but there was some confusion around the system.
- Students believe there should be more promotion and visibility of DEAP.
- There is a desire for more scholarship opportunities and a larger office with more computers.

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INFORMATION**

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**STUDY PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study was to understand the benefits students receive from participating in Diversity Enrichment Achievement Program (DEAP). In addition, we assessed the extent to which DEAP is meeting its program objectives, providing a safe space for the students it serves, connecting students to appropriate resources at IUPUI, and aiding student success. The information obtained in this focus group will be used to facilitate improvements to programs and services for the coming academic year. The results from this study are intended to be shared as part of the special populations program review to determine how IUPUI can better serve its diverse student population.

**METHOD**

Trained members of the Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support (IRDS) facilitated the student focus groups. The project was supervised by Steve Graunke.

**Recruitment Procedures**

Student members of DEAP were asked to participate in the study when they met for their monthly meeting. DEAP members were notified about the study by Eric Williams, director of DEAP, prior to the meeting via email. They were told that food and refreshments would be served following the focus groups interviews. Prior to the start of discussion in the focus groups, a member of the IRDS research team explained how the focus group would work and summarized the content. They also asked permission to record the session, and no participants declined. The two focus groups lasted about 60 minutes each.

**Participants**

A total of 18 non-white domestic students participated in two focus groups. Sixteen of the students were female. Class levels ranged from freshmen to seniors.

**Data Analysis**

Analytical procedures included an exploratory content analysis of the DEAP focus groups’ transcriptions. This comprehensive report considers an overall view of the two groups. Therefore, its main goal is to understand and describe notable themes found across the focus groups. Because the total number of students was small, some aspects of the data have been considered significant to report and address despite infrequency. In this study, the goal is to represent the perspective of the participants rather than attempt to generalize to a broader group.

**Content Analysis**

The audio recordings were transcribed, and the text of the focus groups was analyzed to find the most significant content themes and meaning that emerged from the data. Patton (2002) describes content analysis as “referring to any qualitative data reduction or sense making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). In respecting content analysis as an analytical technique, a set of codes were developed. The process of developing these codes was based on the foundations of grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory posits that the central tenants of experience and phenomenon are held within the lives of the participants being studied, and that a general theory will emerge as a

result of examining the lived experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

### Coding Process

A coding process was employed as the primary means of examination. Corbin and Strauss's (1990) work explains, "data using the grounded theory method is frequently referred to as coding to depict the process by which data are collapsed into smaller pieces of data, categorized, considered, and conceptualized in new ways" (p. 348). Specifically, the focus groups' transcriptions were analyzed carefully by creating codes and code groups that represented the content of the students' input. Each code was generated directly from the data.

### RESULTS

Several notable themes emerged in the focus group data through analysis. These themes are presented and supported by actual examples of students' statements. Although names have been redacted to help promote confidentiality, this authentic student feedback has not been altered in any other way. It is hoped that this method of results presentation will allow for a trustworthy representation of students' experiences in DEAP.

The results are organized by the questions asked in the focus groups. Students were asked questions about their initial involvement with DEAP, the environment DEAP creates, how their cultural values are affirmed through the program, their satisfaction with support and resources they've received, connections to IUPUI through DEAP, and experiences with mentoring programs. Students were also given the opportunity to make suggestions on how to improve the program and to express other comments that may not have been covered by our questions.

#### How did you find out about DEAP, and what made you want to join?

Students were given a notecard and instructed to write down 1) how they found out about DEAP, and 2) what made them want to join. The written responses to the notecard activity are included below:

How you found out	Why you joined
I found out about DEAP through IUPUI's homepage while I was applying for college.	DEAP sparked my attention and decided it would be a good fit for me.
I met a group of girls and when asked to go do homework with them they took me to DEAP, where other students were doing work as well.	I joined by talking to Eric and filling out class schedule.
Email over summer	Having a mentor; scholarship; being held accountable
I got an email my senior year of high school from Dr. K that DEAP offered a scholarship if you participated in bridge so I applied.	I decided to join because I needed the scholarship money.
My girlfriend	The opportunities that [my girlfriend] mentioned to me (scholarships, volunteering opportunities, networking)
I found out about DEAP through a fellow classmate who I had repeated classes with.	I joined because of friendly staff and resources available to members.
During orientation I met Angel	I wanted to have a place where I could go and they would understand me.
I found out about DEAP through a student in the SAAS program.	I joined in the group because it helped me commit to my academics, meet new people, and be more active in the community.
From a facilitator that went to Ivy Tech and now goes here.	To build relationships with people and to get more connected to IUPUI. Also, to help with academic struggles.
I learn about DEAP after attending a SAAS meeting.	The family atmosphere and resources provided (mentors, tutors) led me to join DEAP. Mostly the atmosphere.
I found out about the DEAP program through one of my friends. She invited me to come up and talk to Dr. Shabazz about choosing my major.	[Dr. Shabazz] was very helpful and I could see how the program helped students just by my interaction with her.
I found out about DEAP through my friends who knew their way around the school.	I decided to join DEAP because I liked the idea of helping [other] students achieve their goals.

I found out about the DEAP program through a friend that was already participating in the program.	What made me decide to join was the opportunities that was being offered and the resources that can help improve my experience academically and personally.
Letter/invitation upon acceptance to IUPUI	What DEAP had to offer to me & how the program would help me transition into college from high school, as well as how it would help me excel in my career & education. Personal development.
I think DEAP found me. I didn't know much about it or how to apply before coming to IUPUI	The statistics the DEAP leaders presented made me decide to join. Less than half of the people of color who start college finish and I thought DEAP would help me not be one of those statistics

The majority of students who were interviewed learned about DEAP through friends and classmates, and some through involvements with other programs on campus, such as SAAS and Summer Bridge. Students read their notecards to the group and discussions followed.

- “I joined from a fellow classmate...She asked me if had I ever heard of this program before and I said no. So she took me to the office and I met Eric and Angel.”
- “I learned about DEAP after going to a SAAS meeting... it seemed like everyone was talking about DEAP and about how they hang in the DEAP lounge and I wanted to know what it was so I went, and they encouraged me to join.”

Students reported that they joined DEAP because of the academic and social opportunities it provided. They were compelled by the personal relationships they would form, as well as the academic support and resources offered by the program.

- “It was mostly like the family atmosphere that really drew me in.”
- “I came to college not expecting to have anyone really care; like that’s all anyone told me in high school. But DEAP basically made a liar out of them.”
- “I saw the resources and opportunities that DEAP offered and I really liked that.”

**Do you think that DEAP has created an environment that helps you feel welcome on campus?**

Students unanimously agreed that DEAP made them feel welcome at IUPUI. They attribute this to the strong relationships they’ve built with their advisors in the program as well as with one another. To many, DEAP is a “safe haven” or a “home away from home.”

- “I was going through some personal issues and I went up to Eric and I talked to him about it... I felt really welcome, really at home, because he was kind of like a school father to me.”
- “Being at a predominately white institution, the fact that we, as a minority, can have a place, a safe haven, however you want to word it, that’s big.”
- “It’s literally a family and a support system away from home.”
- “You’ll go to the campus center and all the tables are packed, but then you’ll see someone in DEAP and sit with them instead of sitting by yourself.”

**To what extent does DEAP share or affirm your cultural values?**

Based on the focus group discussion, DEAP helps students to acknowledge the challenges they mayface as a minority group, but encourages them to succeed despite these barriers.

- “I feel like DEAP helps us to kind of approach certain situations with a stronger mind. They’ll tell us a certain statistic, they’ll tell us how we may be generalized, they’ll tell us what odds are against us, but they’ll also tell us that we’re not about to use that as a crutch... We’re gonna succeed no matter if we are the only person of color in our class... We’re not gonna be ashamed or apologetic about anything.”
- “They remind you that everybody’s watching and waiting for us to fail because we’re people of color, but you can’t just give them a reason to think that.”
- “The environment that we can be a family, as one, as a minority.”

One student mentioned that DEAP helped her learn more about her culture and history.

- “We [African Americans] don’t really know much about our history as a race... So DEAP searches around

campus and connects us with things like ASA (African Student Association) and Young Gifted and Black. So they're kind of like educating us and keeping us aware. And when we learn that history, it's motivation for us because we see the resilience of our race."

### **How has DEAP supported your academic and social needs?**

Students felt that DEAP supported them academically by providing them with useful resources and connecting them to other resources on campus. Among the helpful resources mentioned in our discussion were the mentoring program, tutors, workshops, scholarships, midterm checkups, and the study time tracking system.

- "You don't want to have a random tutor."
- "When we do those midterm checkups, I'm reminded of how much Angel and Eric do for us, and it's like I want to make them proud, so I work harder."
- "I feel like we have a lot more resources than students around school have. Like, we know about everything that's going on."
- "[After joining DEAP] I went from a 2.50 to a 3.80."

Students also felt that having advisors who knew them helped them succeed academically, as well as personally.

- "[My DEAP advisors] see something in me that I don't ... They've seen how I've grown. They know my strengths and my weaknesses."
- "I have two Kelley School of Business advisors, and they stick strictly to the paper... but Eric asks me about what I *want* to do, where I see myself... then incorporates it with what I *need* to do."

In terms of social needs, students enjoyed getting together as a group at meetings and events and also informally in the DEAP lounge. Based on the discussion, it is quite clear that the close-knit community in DEAP provides students with a strong social support system.

- "I definitely think it has given me more of a social support system, as well as making sure I am academically prepared."
- "I liked the community service because it got people together...and you start talking to new people during that time and continue to talk afterwards."
- "I can come from class, and I'll be tired and ready to go home, and then I'll go to DEAP and I will sit up there for 4 hours, and I'm like, where did my time go? I'm supposed to be asleep!"
- "I've grown so many relationships with other people that I probably would never have talked to."

### **What are you getting from DEAP that you couldn't get elsewhere?**

Based on the focus group responses, DEAP provides students with a supportive network that they feel they could not get elsewhere on campus. Students appreciate how much their DEAP advisors know and understand them, and how hard their advisors work on their behalf.

- "We get academic support, personal support, relationships, and with those relationships you grow trust that helps build connections. The family atmosphere that we have. It's all in one."
- "Networking. As many programs as I am in, I have never networked with so many people as I have with DEAP."
- "I would say Eric – he's a male – and a lot of us don't have positive male role models... So I think he's somebody that is missing out of a lot of our lives."
- "I feel like [my DEAP advisors] can understand me more. I can talk to Eric and he will say, 'I understand,' where I feel like if I were to go somewhere else on campus they may support me but they don't really understand what I'm trying to say."
- "Being diverse, a lot of the times we go through the same hardships. We struggle with the same things. It's different when you are talking to a mentor that doesn't know or feel where you are coming from."

When faced with administrative issues, students found it was more efficient to go straight to their DEAP advisors, who then quickly resolved the issue on their behalf, rather than getting the "run-around" through other offices.

- "I experienced asking financial aid for something, and financial aid said I can't do that, and then somebody [in another office] says, 'well you *can* do that,' and I feel like DEAP wouldn't just be like, 'OK, you can,' ... They would look at our stuff, make sure all our things are in line, get the for sure answer and tell us – not just putting us in a loop hole."

- “Eric can handle business, so if I can’t express it or if I’m not understanding it, I can go talk to him and he’ll be my words for me. Like, he knows what to do, so just a sense of having him of course makes things easier, because I don’t really know everything that goes on, like, I guess in an employee setting of IUPUI – I’m just a student. So they could give me the run-around, I could go back and tell Eric, and he will go and find out the truth and help us.”

**In what ways has DEAP connected you with helpful students, faculty, staff, and other resources on campus?**

As mentioned earlier, students felt that they were highly exposed to external campus resources, such as the MAC, through their involvement with DEAP. Students seem to value the connections that their DEAP advisors have with other faculty and staff at IUPUI, which allows them to connect with others on campus.

- “Eric knows a lot of people and if I have a question about something he’ll tell me exactly who I need to talk to and introduce me to them.”
- “They help us look for other scholarships and tell us where to find them.”
- “I think it’s good that they bring other people in to our monthly meetings. One time they brought David Heard in and I ended up going to his office and he helped me tailor a resume that came out so great.”

**Describe your experiences with peer mentoring.**

Overall, students reported positive experiences with their peer mentors. Peer mentors appear to provide students with strong personal relationships, as well as an extra push to succeed in school.

- “I’m a senior now and I still talk to my mentor! For me, that’s a real relationship.”
- “She still checks up on me, and if I’m having problems I go to her. I can count on her.”
- “Having a mentor is like having that responsible friend. They understand you, they love you, they see where you are coming from, but you still gotta get this done.”
- “I like how my mentor is kind of like my friend.”
- “My mentor would take us to the library and stay there until it closed, so he like really pushed his mentees and really stood there.”

One student mentioned that she transferred to IUPUI and was given a freshman mentor, but felt that she would have benefitted more from someone at the graduate level, or perhaps a faculty/staff mentor.

- “I don’t know if I ever had a mentor, or I don’t think I had the right type of mentor. They scheduled me one but it wasn’t for like a graduate level, it was more like freshman type of mentor...but really I needed someone for graduate school because I came in late.”

**Describe your experiences with faculty/staff mentors.**

A few of the students interviewed had faculty/staff mentors, and again reported positive experiences. Students found that these mentors were helpful in getting them prepared for life after college, and also acted as inspirational role models in a way that motivated them to succeed in their careers.

- “Now you get the real world reality...not just a college experience...so it’s just getting us prepared and helping us for that next stage.”
- “Most of our mentors are at high levels of work I guess, so it’s motivating to think that they’ve made it this far.”

**What suggestions do you have to improve DEAP?**

The students interviewed were overall very satisfied with their experiences in DEAP. However, they had some suggestions for ways in which IUPUI could improve the program. Students indicated that they would like to see more support for DEAP – both in terms of finances so that they can afford more resources, as well as through greater promotion and awareness of DEAP to others. Several students as well said that they would like to see more scholarship opportunities and a larger office space.

- “More scholarship opportunities. Not just for mentors but for other students.”
- “The area needs to be expanded. I can go in there some days and not have a computer so I have to go to the library or the MAC. So just the area and the computers.”
- “I hope other students could have a study abroad opportunity through the DEAP program.”
- “I would say more promotion of DEAP around school. Honestly, I’ve been walking around and I never knew what [DEAP] was, I just knew all the minorities were in one area.”

- “I’ve witnessed a college tour being done and they didn’t come back there [to the DEAP office]. I don’t think they even pointed that way.”

### **Final comments**

Students in both focus groups concluded the discussion by reaffirming their satisfaction with the program.

- “I just feel like every school should have this. If this actually grew into every college, it would help a lot.”
- “I love DEAP. That is my family forever and for always. I will come back to IUPUI and will do lectures for the students. I will be a speaker to the DEAP students and inspire them. DEAP is one of those programs I will come back and put my time and effort into.”

## **OVERALL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Overall, focus group participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences in the DEAP program. Students regarded DEAP as an “all-in-one” service that provides them with academic, social, personal, and professional support to facilitate their success in various aspects of life.

A dominant underlying theme that emerged was the shared sense of community among DEAP members, who repeatedly referred to the program as a “family.” In addition, students valued having advisors who know and understand their situation, and did not feel they could receive the same level of both academic and personal support elsewhere on IUPUI’s campus. Lastly, students conveyed that DEAP inspires them to succeed by educating them on the challenges they may face as a minority group and overcoming those barriers together.

## **POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS**

The results suggest that students are satisfied with their experiences in DEAP as well as the various forms of support that the program offers. Students shared stories about how DEAP helped them to develop relationships, decide a major, raise their GPA, manage personal issues, adjust to college life, and connect with other helpful people and resources on campus, among other things. In addition, students valued the tight-knit community of their program and appreciated being with people who understood their unique struggles as a member of a minority group. The students interviewed were clearly appreciative of the help they have received from the program.

Because of these positive experiences, the students interviewed were eager to extend help to others who may benefit from participation in DEAP. However, there were concerns about promotion and awareness of the program. Students felt that more should be done to inform non-members of DEAP and explain the benefits of joining. As evidenced by the results of this study, students reported they joined DEAP for a combination of social and academic opportunities offered. This information should be taken into account as selling points for future prospective members. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to increase marketing efforts in order to make DEAP more visible to incoming students and other non-members. Over half of the focus group participants learned about DEAP through their peers, but we would suggest focusing on strategies to reach out to students who do not already have such connections.

In regards to mentoring programs, students generally reported positive experiences. While all students were required to have a peer mentor their first year, several of the students interviewed also had faculty/staff mentors, and were very pleased with the unique insights these mentors provided. However, there appeared to be some confusion around faculty/staff mentors, and one student believed to have signed up to be partnered with one and was assigned a peer mentor instead. DEAP staff should ensure the rules and requirements for attaining these mentors are clearly explained and understood. Students also indicated that it would be helpful if DEAP had more funds to devote to scholarships and additional office resources, as they appeared to be unsatisfied with the current office space and availability of computers.

In sum, focus group participants were extremely satisfied with their experiences in DEAP. We would suggest that DEAP continue to focus on providing a variety of academic and personal resources to their members. Improvements suggested by participants include greater marketing of the program, clearer explanations about faculty/staff mentors, and discussions about where funds need to be allocated.