The Trusted Expert and Internationally Recognized Leader for all Postsecondary Student Transitions
The Role of Peer Leaders in the First-Year Experience: Learning from Research Data

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2014 European First-Year Experience Conference
Nottingham Trent University

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Introduction

BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Peer Pressure

- Peers have a significant and profound impact on the undergraduate experience:
  - Intellectual development
  - Academic Engagement
  - Moral Development
  - Clarification of Political and Social Values
  - Determination of Academic and Social Self-Concept
  - Interpersonal Skills
  - Critical Thinking Skills
  - Positive Gains in Writing and Reading Comprehension

(Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Skipper, 2005)
Peer Pressure

“The student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years.”

(Astin, 1993)
Defining “Peer Leadership”

“Students who have been selected and trained to offer educational services to their peers. These services are intentionally designed to assist in the adjustment, satisfaction, and persistence of students toward attainment of their educational goals, Students performing in [these] paraprofessional roles are usually compensated in some manner for their services and are supervised by qualified professionals.”

(Ender & Newton, 2000; Newton & Ender, 2010)
Background on Peer Leaders

• Historically, Peer Leaders were situated in co-curricular roles in orientation or residence life (Ender & Kay, 2001)

• Recently, the use of Peer Leaders in the classroom and academic realm has become more widespread (Greenfield, et al., 2013; Shook & Keup, 2012)
  – Roles: tutors, Supplemental Instruction leaders, and peer advisors
  – Courses: English composition, introductory mathematics, gateway courses, and first-year seminars
Background on Peer Leaders

• Peer leaders are empowered to exert influence in a less intimidating way than staff or faculty \((Cuseo, 1991; Hart, 1995)\)

• Student paraprofessionals are an effective and efficient resource

• The use of peer leaders provides benefit to:
  – **Programs**: improved student outcomes, stronger bridge between faculty/staff and students
  – **Students**: more opportunities for student interventions
  – **Peer leaders**: engagement with faculty & staff, leadership training
Background on Peer Leaders

• “Illuminating the Process of Peer Mentoring: An Examination and Comparison of Peer Mentors’ and First-Year Students’ Experiences” by L.J. Holt & C.A. Berwise

• “Realized Benefits for First-Year Student Peer Educators” by M.R. Wawrzynski & A.M. Beverly

• “Understanding the Dynamics of Peer Mentor Learning: A Narrative Study” by B. Bunting, B. Dye, S. Pinnegar, & K. Robinson

• “Transitions Through Pastoral Peer Mentoring: A Qualitative Analysis of the Challenges and Successes” R. Kenedy, V. Monty, & M. Lambart-Drache
Methodology

2013 NATIONAL SURVEY OF PEER LEADERS

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
Method: Data Source

2013 National Survey of Peer Leaders

• Pilot in 2009 garnered 1,972 student respondents
• 2013 survey was a partnership with 5 leading educational organizations involved with peer leaders:
  – ACUHO-I
  – International Center for Supplemental Instruction
  – NACA
  – National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition
  – NODA
• Institutional recruitment took place first: 49 campuses
Method: Data Source

2013 National Survey of Peer Leaders

• Student survey administered Spring 2013
• 4,932 student peer leaders responded to the survey (28.6% response rate)
• Student sample over-represents women and high academic performers
• Student sample has adequate representation by race/ethnicity, class standing, & Pell Grant eligibility
• Limitations: U.S. students & campus-specific PLEs
Findings

TYPE AND NUMBER OF PEER LEADER EXPERIENCES
### Most Common PL Sponsors

What type of campus-based organization have you worked for as a peer leader, either currently or in the past? (n = 4,016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Leader Experience</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student clubs and organization(s)</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence Hall</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Year Experience</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus activities</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic - peer advisor</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community service or service learning</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic - Tutor</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Least Common PL Sponsors

What type of campus-based organization have you worked for as a peer leader, either currently or in the past? (n = 4,016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Leader Experience</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic-Supplemental Instruction leader</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural affairs</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study abroad</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor or recreational sports</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling or mental health</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student productions or media</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial affairs or student conduct</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International student office</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial literacy</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of Peer Leader Experiences

How many peer leader positions do you currently hold? (n = 3,527)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Peer Leader Positions</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of Peer Leader Experiences

Including any current positions, how many total peer leader positions have you held during your college experience? (n = 4,016)
On average, how many hours per week do you spend performing your peer leader responsibilities? (n = 4,016)
“Students who have been selected and trained to offer educational services to their peers. These services are intentionally designed to assist in the adjustment, satisfaction, and persistence of students toward attainment of their educational goals. Students performing in [these] paraprofessional roles are usually compensated in some manner for their services and are supervised by qualified professionals.”

Results

PEER LEADER SELECTION, TRAINING, & COMPENSATION
PL Selection Process

Which of the following best describes the peer leader selection process you went through (n = 3,942)

Application: 86.4%

Election: 38.8%

Nomination: 35.9%

Other: 2.8%
Training

Were you trained for your peer leader position(s)?
(n = 3,942)

- Yes: 85.6%
- No: 13.5%
- I don't know: 0.8%
How long was the initial formal training for your current and/or previous peer leader position(s)? (n = 3,353)

- Half a day or less: 22.8%
- 1 day: 18.6%
- 2 days: 17.5%
- 3 days: 10.8%
- 4 days: 5.8%
- 1 week: 17.3%
- 2 weeks: 21.0%
- 3 weeks: 7.3%
- Enrollment in class: 19.4%
- Other: 6.9%
**Training**

Did you receive any additional ongoing formal training after the initial training? (n = 3,353)

- Yes: 68.8%
- No: 28.8%
- I don't know: 2.4%

What type of additional ongoing formal training did you receive? (n = 2,303)

- Retreat: 38.5%
- Staff meetings: 61.2%
- Meetings with supervisor: 47.8%
- Other: 7.1%

**www.sc.edu/fye**
What compensation did or do you receive for your work as a peer leader? (n = 3,942)

- Volunteer Compensation: 59.4%
- Financial Compensation: 56.0%
- Room and board: 23.7%
- Course credit: 15.1%
- Other: 4.4%
Findings

PEER LEADER OUTCOMES
Outcomes of Peer Leader Experiences

• Student peer leaders were asked to report their growth in four outcome areas:
  – “To what degree has the following (outcome) changed as a direct result of your peer leadership experiences?”

• Outcome areas
  – Skills
  – Undergraduate Experiences
  – Employability Outcomes
  – Academic Performance
## Outcomes of PLEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Development</th>
<th>% Increased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal communication</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>77.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>67.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Outcomes of PLEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate Experience</th>
<th>% Increased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of campus resources</td>
<td>83.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful interaction with peers</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of belonging at institution</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful interaction with staff members</td>
<td>75.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with people from different backgrounds</td>
<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful interaction with faculty</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding people from different backgrounds</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to engage in continuous learning</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to persist at institution</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Outcomes of PLEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employability Outcomes</th>
<th>% Increased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building professional interpersonal relationships</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying knowledge to a real-world setting</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing together info from different places</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing direction through persuasion</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing a problem from new perspectives</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations for success in a FT job after grad</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating innovative approaches to a task</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in ethical decision-making</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing ideas with others in writing</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Outcomes of PLEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Performance</th>
<th>% Increased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic skill development</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall academic performance</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade point average</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of credit hours completed each term</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate timely graduation</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Satisfaction with PLEs

How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your peer leadership experiences?

- Very dissatisfied: 1.5%
- Dissatisfied: 4%
- Slightly dissatisfied: 9%
- Neutral: 19%
- Slightly satisfied: 49%
- Satisfied: 51%
- Very satisfied: 51%

Would you recommend being a peer leader to other students?

- Yes, absolutely: 80.4%
- Yes, for most of the peer leadership positions I have held: 14.9%
- Yes, for some of the peer leadership positions I have held (but not most): 4%
- No: 1.5%
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS
Takeaways - Overall

• Peer leaders report engagement in experiences
  – Largest concentration of respondents reported spending between 6 and 15 hours per week on PL responsibilities
  – Most report active involvement in selection process
  – Many have training experiences of a week or longer
  – Majority report ongoing training
  – Many do not receive compensation (i.e., volunteer)

• Peer leaders report satisfaction with the experience
  – Nearly all respondents (96%) would recommend at least some peer leadership positions to other students
Takeaways - Overall

- Insight into common and potential selection, training, and compensation models
- Peer leaders report Growth due to experiences
  - Overall majority report gains on nearly all outcomes in skills, undergraduate experiences, and employability outcomes
  - Academic outcomes not as strongly affected by PLEs
  - Method of advancing intercultural competency
  - Highly transferable to career
Next Steps: Dissemination

• Conference presentations and scholarly journal articles
• Scholarly practice book
• Institute on Peer Educators from November 7-9, 2014 at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC (USA)
Next Steps: International Survey of Peer Leaders
Questions?

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