Providing a High-Impact and Transformative Peer Leader Experience

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Goals for the Session

• What do you hope to gain from the session?
Goals for the Session

• After participating in this facilitated discussion, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the characteristics of transformative and high-impact peer leadership experiences;
2. Apply a framework for facilitating high-impact and transformative peer leadership experiences to the design of high-quality peer leadership experiences on their own campus; and
3. Continue to network and collaborate with session colleagues who share an interest in peer leadership as a high-impact practice.
“The student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years.”

(Astin, 1993)
Background on Peer Leaders

- The use of Peer Leaders provides benefits to:
  - Programs
    - Improved student outcomes
    - Shared workload with staff and instructors
    - Strengthened connection between staff, instructors, and students (with Peer Leader as the bridge)
  - Students
    - Improved student outcomes
    - Increased attention
    - Expanded opportunities for student interventions
  - Peer Leaders
    - Training and ongoing support
    - Engagement with faculty and staff
    - Challenging duties and responsibilities
    - Reflection and self-appraisal
Definition of High-Impact Practices

• “Teaching and learning practices that have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds. These practices take many different forms, depending upon learner characteristics and on institutional priorities and contexts. [HIPS are] practices that educational research suggests increase rates of retention and student engagement.”
(Kuh, 2010)
Characteristics of High-Impact Practices

• Investment of time and energy
• Real-world applications
• Reflection and integrative learning
• Interaction with faculty and peers about substantive matters
• Frequent feedback
• High expectations
• Accountability
• Exposure to diverse perspectives
A Framework for high-impact and transformative PL experience

- Intentionally designed & purposeful everyday practices
- Opportunities to engage in challenging & unfamiliar practices
- Integration of theory/conceptual understanding with experience
- Frequent & structured opportunities for reflection
- Participation in a peer leadership “community of practice”
Discussion

• Which of the benefits of peer leadership have you witnessed with the students you have worked with?

• When have you seen the peer leadership experience have a transformative impact upon PLs on your campus?

• How do you know that students have gained benefits?
Results from a National Survey of Peer Leaders

• Investment of Time and Energy
  – Total # of peer leader experiences
  – Time spent performing peer leader responsibilities

• High Expectations
  – Training

• Reflection and Integrated Learning/Frequent Feedback
  – Ongoing formal training

• Real-World Applications
  – Skill Development and Employability Outcomes
Investment of Time and Energy

Evidence of Engagement
• Half of all peer leaders have held 2-4 total PL positions
• Nearly half of all peer leaders spend 6-15 hours per week on PL duties

Over-Engagement?
• 1 in 10 have held 8 or more PL positions
• More than 1 in 20 spend 30 or more hours per week.
High Expectations

Communicating Expectations through Training

- 85% of peer leaders received some training for their peer leader positions
- 4.5 in 10 reported training for one or more PL experience lasted one week or longer

Expectations Unclear – Little or no Training

- 15% of peer leaders did not receive formal training for their positions
- 6 in 10 reported training for one or more PL experience was 2 days or shorter
Reflection and Integrated Learning/ Frequent Feedback

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%
### Real-World Applications

<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>
# Real-World Applications

<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>
Discussion

• What are the key components of a high-impact PL experience?

• What are some of the “best practices” you have implemented on your campus (or seen on other campuses) that seem to facilitate a high-impact PL experience?

• How are you structuring your peer educator program to provide a high-impact educational experience?

• How can we make high-impact PL experience more likely for a diversity of students?
Key Takeaways

• Providing a high-impact and transformative PL experience requires intentionality and thoughtful inclusion of key elements.
  – Supervision that is educational and relational (not just transactional).
  – Regular reflection and feedback.
  – Ongoing training.
• Investment of Time and Energy Matters.
• Seek to involve students who would not normally think to be involved.
• Peer leadership isn’t just about efficiencies
  *it should be an educationally purposeful experience.
High-Impact Practices

“While promising, they are not a panacea. Only when they are implemented well and continually evaluated...will we realize their considerable potential.”

- Kuh in Brownell & Swaner, 2010
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References
