Presentation Outline

• Background of First-Year Florida course and peer leader training pre-2008
• Revamping the training course
• Assessment of our peer leaders’ growth and development (08-09)
• Lessons learned
• “Your Turn”
Background/History on First-Year Florida Course

• Implemented in Fall 2003
• 1 credit (non-mandatory) course
• First-year transition/introduction to college course
• 40 summer sections, 60 fall sections
• Special-Population sections including: Engineering, Business, HHP, PHHP, Exploratory, Nursing, FOS, HSAA, etc.
Role of the Peer Leader

- Maintain and develop partnership with assigned co-instructor.
- Become familiar with the needs of new students.
- Develop a rapport with new students.
- Be accessible and willing to assist with informational needs of students.
- Plan out-of-class activities such as the service project component of the course.
- Prepare and conduct well-organized presentations, class discussions, and activities on various topics.
- Serve as an academic and social role model.
- Communicate accurate and timely information to students about academic and student resources.
- Respond appropriately to feedback and evaluations.
Peer Leader Selection Timeline and Training Basics

**Pre-Teaching Training**
- Selection process held during fall semester
- 3 rounds of interviews
- Half day retreat held at beginning of spring semester
- Spring training class: 2 credits given during fall semester
- Service trip
- Mini Conference held at the end of spring semester, with co-instructors

**Continued Training**
- 15 min one on one with pro-staff
- Monthly mentor meeting with returning Peer Mentor
- Continued education seminar
- Follow up assignments including
- Learning contract
- Mid term assessment
- End of year portfolio
- Co-Instructor Evaluation
- Round table discussion sessions
Why did we revamp peer leader training & experience?

*Theoretical Issues*
- Development of student leaders
- Community development
- “Perk” or reward for this group

*Practical Issues*
- Retention of returning peer leaders down
- Peer leaders not having confidence in the role
- Peer Leader/Instructor relationship struggle
- Primarily because of communication

*Your turn:* Are you noticing any similar or different issues with your peer leaders and their experience?
Strengths Quest 101

• Gallup Organization & development of instrument
• Focus on strength and not weakness
• Strength: The ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity. To build your strengths, identify your talents, and add knowledge and skills (Gallup, 2004).
  – Strength = Talent + Knowledge + Skills
• Why Strengths Inventory?
SQ and the Peer Leader Training Course

• Retreat – assessment taken prior to course
• Weekly Journaling
• Strengths Quest Interview
• 90 second teach in groups of 4
• In class topical discussions
• Integrated throughout all 6 class meetings
SQ and the Peer Leader Teaching Experience

- Mini-Conference Keynote Lecture
- Weekly Conversations with co-instructor
  - Examples:
    - How do you anticipate using your strengths in the classroom?
    - Share a recent success in your recent FYF class, how did you each contribute to that success?
    - Provide one another with feedback using their top 5 strengths.
- Mentoring Groups
- 15min meeting with NSP Staff
- Roundtable discussion
Peer Leader Assessment

• Created to measure the impact of the Peer Leader experience on Peer Leader growth and development in the following knowledge and skill areas:
  — Diversity
  — Leadership*
  — Communication
  — Self-knowledge*

• Implementation of Assessment was done through a Pre and Post Assessment.
  — Pre-assessment completed by 58 PLs at the prior to spring retreat
  — Post-assessment completed by 55 PLs during last week of teaching semester
  — Additional assessments used included a Peer Leader Survey given to all FYF students
Knowledge Assessment Sample

Self-Knowledge

Rate your knowledge level on the self-assessment scale, using 1 = no understanding, 2 = basic understanding, 3 = moderate understanding, 4 = good understanding, 5 = exceptional understanding.

• I am aware how my personal values affect the decisions I make.
• I understand the meaning of professional ethics.
• I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses.
• I am able to define what a social and academic role model is.
• I am confident in my knowledge of campus resources available to me.
• I can identify factors that may cause stress in my life.
• I know what motivates me.
• I understand my learning style.
• I know the areas in my life which I possess talent.
• I can productively apply my strengths in my life.
Skill Assessment Sample

Self-Knowledge Skill

*Rate your skill level on the self-assessment scale, using 1 = insufficient skill level, 2 = basic skill level, 3 = moderate skill level, 4 = good skill level, 5 = exceptional skill level.*

- I am able to make confident decisions when the proper amount of information is provided.
- I create a healthy balance between academic, employment, and co-curricular commitments.
- I am an academic and social role model.
- I am an effective time manager.
- I am able to incorporate my learning style in my learning.
- I am able to say no to commitments when feeling overwhelmed.
- I set goals and work to achieve them.
- I can productively apply my strengths in my life.

*Your Turn: How do you assess the impact of your peer leader program?*
Assessment Findings: Leadership

I know how I contribute to a team.

I understand how I am perceived as part of a group.
Assessment Findings: Leadership

I am comfortable facilitating groups of my peers.
Assessment Findings: Self-Knowledge

I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses.

I am an academic and social role model.
Assessment Findings: Self-Knowledge

I know the areas in my life which I possess talent.

I can productively apply my strengths in my life.
Assessment Findings: Leadership/Self-Knowledge

I can productively apply my strengths to make myself a better leader.
Assessment Findings Linked

Overall increase in skill level and knowledge in the following areas:

- Ability to productively apply strengths to make myself a better leader
- Confidence in my leadership abilities
- Knowledge of personal strengths
- Understanding of how to apply my strengths in my life

Peer Leaders who noted having an exceptional skill or knowledge level in the above areas also showed a higher skill or knowledge level when compared to those with a good, moderate, basic or insufficient in the following areas:

- Understanding of how I contribute to a team
- Understanding of how I am perceived as part of a team
- Ability to lead a class or group of my peers
- Ability to collaborate with others on a given task
- Knowledge of what things motivate me

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Final Reflection Paper Comments
Student Learning and Engagement

• “It seemed that my students were much more likely to contribute [in class] if they felt they had a connection with me. Using my woo strength, I would always try to talk to my students before I stepped into my teaching shoes”

• “As an achiever, I made it my goal to have an objective for every class. I wanted my students to leave class having accomplished something.”

• “A strength my co-instructor and I shared was empathy. Because of this, it was easy for us to detect when a student was confused or when a student felt disconnected in class.”
Final Reflection Paper Comments
Teaching Partnerships

• “After each class, I would always sit down with my co-instructor and evaluate my performance. Knowing that one of my strengths is context, I looked for ways to use my past classroom experience to become a better peer leader.”

• “My co-instructor and I would talk about strengths each week at our meeting. I feel it helped us learn about each other and develop our partnership. My discipline strength helped us stay on schedule.”

• “Because of my achiever and responsibility strengths, I struggled a bit with my co-instructor’s laid-back approach. I was able to find a good medium and compromise when it came to structure and detail so that we could work together as a team.”
Lessons Learned

• Value of Assessment
• Training class instructors knowledgeable about SQ
• Intentionally integrate plan throughout Peer Leader experience
• Returning Peer Leaders
• Co-Instructors – only exposure was mini-conference
• Using campus partnerships

Your Turn: What lessons have you learned that have caused you to make changes in your peer leader program?
Overall Impact on First-Year Florida

- First-Year Student Learning and Engagement
  - 79% rated their PLs facilitation of learning as excellent. (2009) *Up from 68% in 2008.*
  - 77% of students *strongly agreed* that their PL served as an academic and social role model. *Up from 62% in 2008.*
Overall Impact on First-Year Florida

• Teaching Partnerships Improved
  – 85% of FYF students strongly agreed that their PL worked effectively in class with co-instructor. (2009) Up from 75% in 2008.
  – 2009 was the first year that all co-instructors gave their PLs an A grade for final assessment.
Contact Us

Jaime Baker, New Student Programs
jaimeab@dso.ufl.edu
352-392-1261

Leslie Hahn, Florida Opportunity Scholars Program
leslieh@ufsa.ufl.edu
352-392-1265