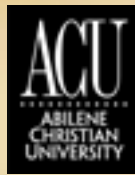


# Leading the Way: Transfer Peer Leader Program

Dr. Eric Gumm

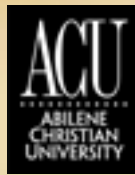
Abilene Christian University

[gummj@acu.edu](mailto:gummj@acu.edu)



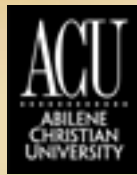
# Rising Tide of Transfer Students

- College enrollment of high school graduates has risen over the past thirty years to greater than 40%
- A growing number of students begin their collegiate studies at a community college – more than 42% at this point
- Studies show that more than 71% of students beginning at a community college plan to earn a bachelor's degree
- Unfortunately, we all know that actually doing so is not so simple and the process of transferring can be complicated and overwhelming – just as the transition to college overall can be.



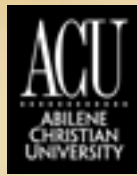
# What are Peer Leaders?

- Research has continually shown that peers have a tremendous influence on new student development:
  - Chickering (1969)
  - Pascarella & Terenzini (1991)
  - Cuseo (1991)
- “Peer leaders support students as they explore, identify, and apply problem-solving strategies to resolve everyday problems and challenges that occur in the student maturation process (Ender & Newton, 2000)



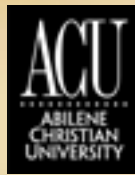
# Context of the Program

- Abilene Christian University
  - Primarily residential, private, faith-based university
  - Primarily regional draw, but students from 49 states and 60 nations
  - Overall student body of approximately 4700
  - Average Incoming student class of 1100
  - Average entering transfer student cohort of 140-160
  - Required University Seminar class for freshmen, which utilizes a Peer Leader



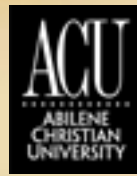
# Origin of the Program Idea

- Idea originated out of my experience with Peer Leaders in our University Seminar class
- My interest in supporting our new transfer students
- And a research project conducted under my supervision by a former intern with transfer students from whom we determined a need existed for an on-going connection



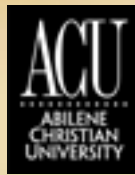
# Rationale for the use of Transfer PLs

- What we were thinking
  - Expressed need for a person transfer students could ask questions of that was a peer
  - Need for better leadership of our Welcome Week transfer groups
  - Wanted to ease a difficult transition for transfer students
  - Desire to improve transfer student retention
- On-going contact would be beneficial instead of relying on informal networking
  - Having a resource person to contact
  - Also someone proactively telling you about important things coming up during the semester
- Did I mention, this could contribute to a greater retention rate for transfer students?



# Other Transfer PL Programs

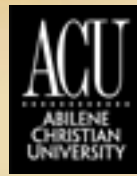
- Oklahoma State University
- University of Virginia
- University of Central Florida
- Iowa State University
- University of Nebraska Lincoln
- University of California at Davis
- Northwestern University
- Concordia University
- California Lutheran University



# What would they do?

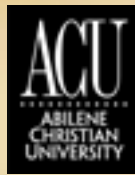
- Job Description
  - Training
  - Welcome Week group leading role
  - Weekly contacts
  - Optional events
  - Regular meetings with program director
- Benefits
  - Training and Experience
  - \$300 stipend





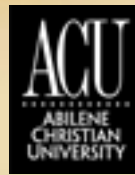
## Recruiting process utilized (and the results)

- Emails sent to all transfer students from the previous semester
- Contact with previous transfer group leaders who had helped with Welcome Week
- Networking among transfer students I knew
- The results were typically – Wow! This is a great idea, I wish I would have had this ... but I can't do it because of my other job
- So, getting candidates proved to be a significant challenge



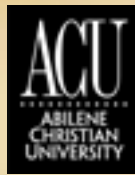
# The implementation process – Year 1

- Recruited transfer peer leaders
- Interviewed applicants
- During Welcome Week, randomly assigned transfer students to the 2 groups with a TPL and the 2 groups without a TPL
- Met with the TPLs to insure understanding of their role and the vision of this program before it began
- Met regularly with the TPLs after Welcome Week to hear their feedback, review planning for the next two weeks and share information that would be relevant to their students



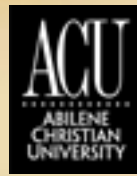
# Struggles experienced and problems encountered

- Uninterested transfer students
- Current transfer students unwilling to get involved
- Difficulty motivating groups to stay the course of the planned interactions
- Participation issues with students not being there for group times
- Lack of responses to on-going communications from the transfer PLs



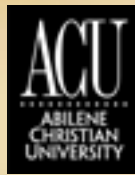
# Initial results from the pilot

- Overall Transfer student retention Fall 2007 to Spring 2008 = 89%
- Transfer student retention of those involved with a Transfer Peer Leader = 94%
- Statistically significant impact
- \$46,788
- Good return on the investment



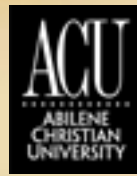
# TPL Program – Year 2

- We utilized a similar recruiting and selection process for the Transfer Peer Leaders – we were able to secure three TPLs this year
- During Welcome Week, randomly assigned transfer students to the 3 groups with a TPL and the 1 group without a TPL
- Continue to meet regularly with the TPLs after Welcome Week to hear their feedback, review planning for the next two weeks and share information that would be relevant to their students



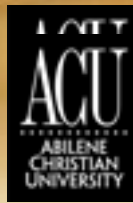
# Additional results from the pilot

- Overall Transfer student retention Fall 2007 to Fall 2008 = 72%
- Transfer student retention of those involved with a Transfer Peer Leader = 94%
- Statistically significant impact
- An additional impact of \$164,496
- Total impact of \$211,284
- Continuing good return on the investment



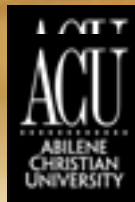
# Where we will be moving with this program

- Even more aggressive recruiting of current transfer students to be involved with the transfer PL program
- We will roll out an implementation of the program with all of our transfer student groups, if enough group leaders can be found
- If possible to implement with all transfer students, then we will communicate what will be happening to the students so they will hopefully be prepared for or expecting the initial contact
- Email messages sent from our office a couple of times during the semester to remind the students about the resource the TPLs provide and to encourage them to utilize their services
- Ongoing research and work to understand our transfer students and provide resources and support they need

The background of the slide is a warm-toned, sepia-colored image. It features a vintage-style map with a grid of latitude and longitude lines. In the upper left corner, a portion of a brass compass is visible, showing its face with cardinal and intercardinal directions (N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, NW) and degree markings. The text "Any Questions?" is centered on the map in a large, bold, black sans-serif font.

**Any Questions?**





**Thank you so much  
for joining us for  
today's presentation!**