The Benefits of Transitioning from Tutoring to Collaborative Study

Becky Kester

The University of Texas at Austin

Take-Aways

- The difference between CS and tutoring
- Bigger goals of CS vs. tutoring
- Lessons learned
- Best practices

TIP Scholars

- TIP's mission: To transform the learning experience so students can pursue their individual potentials. All students are empowered to transform their world for the better.

- How we do that
  - Peer mentoring
  - Linked classes
    - Critical thinking course
  - Dedicated academic advisors
  - Building community
  - Collaborative Studies

Peer Tutoring

- Sessions run by peer mentors
- Training as mentors, not as tutors
- Rough numbers: 600-700 contact hours per semester (AY 2013-14)
- Course and instructor specific

Why the change to CSS

- Growth of cohort size
  - Inability to serve large #s of students with same/decreased resources
- Underutilization of tutoring
- Lack of long-range planning in best interest of students
- Tutoring targets high-risk students, not high-risk courses or high-risk university expectations
  - Students less likely to view CSS as remedial

CSS Goals

- Focus on critical thinking and transferrable skills
- Focus on the bigger picture
  - Emphasize connections
  - Prove understanding
- Emphasize discipline, preparation, & application
- Build confidence, perseverance, & resilience
- Add value at every opportunity
- Empower students to become self-sufficient learners & leaders
- Be okay with making mistakes

A Typical Week

CH 301 CA

- Attend CH 301 lecture
- Facilitate 2-3 (2 hour) sessions of CH 301 collaborative studies
- Attend CH 301 discussion
  - Serve as undergraduate TA during discussion
- Monthly training
- Check in with Lead CA
- Meet with CH 301 instructor and other CH 301 CAs

CH 301 Tutor

- Attend CH 301 lecture
- Tutor 2-3 (2 hour) sessions of CH 301

What We're Seeing Now

- Rough numbers:
  - Fall 2014: 2580 unique visits
  - Spring 2015: 1949 unique visits
  - Fall 2015: 1268 unique visits, as of mid-October
- Closer ties between faculty, peer leaders, and program staff
- Faculty have greater buy-in and involvement
- Attitude and mindset (just reaching turning point)
- Part of TIP culture

Institutional Benefits

- Broader benefits in HS to college transition

- Addresses possible/probably stumbling blocks

- Helps address the post 2nd year attrition
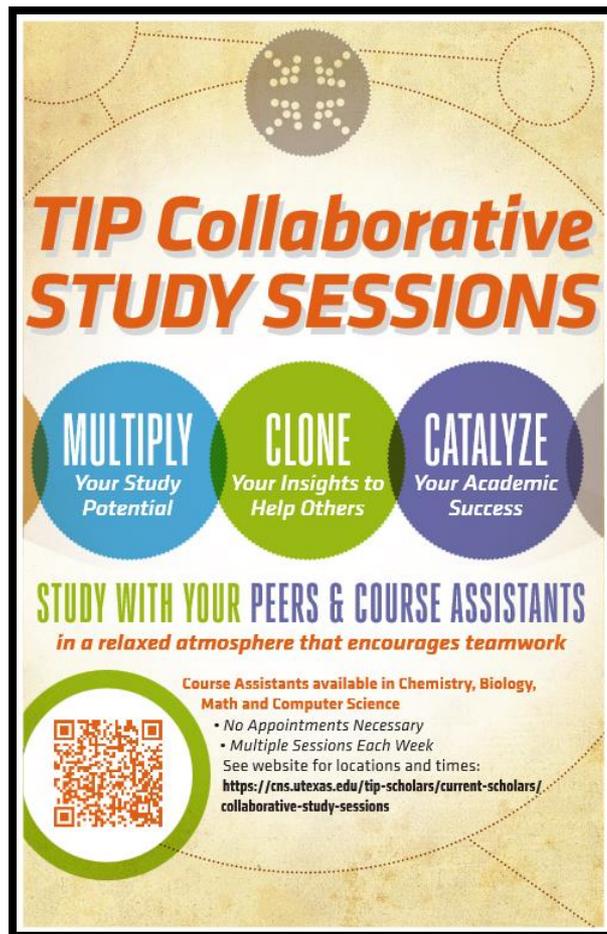
Academic Benefits

- Building community
- Transferrable skills
- Opportunities for
  - Self-assessment
  - Self-monitoring
- Prep for post-baccalaureate life
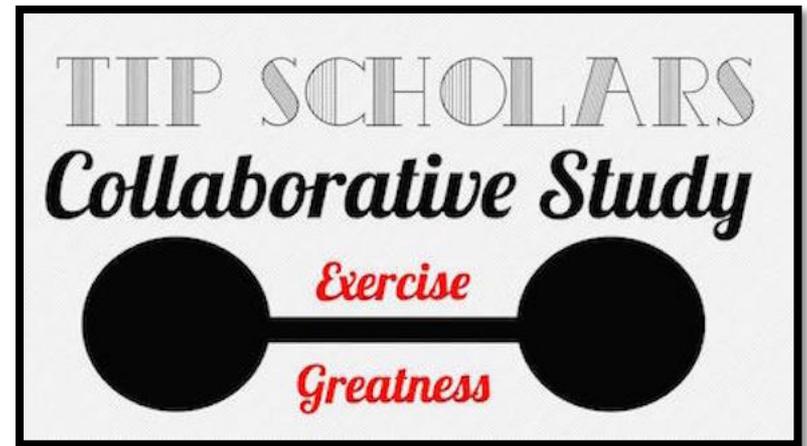
Leadership Development Benefits

- Becoming a Course Assistant (CA)
  - Peer leader
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Problem-solving
- Lead CA
  - Trainings
  - Observations
  - Hiring process
  - Course-specific teams
- Close work with faculty

Training

- NSC 109: Intro to Leading Collaborative Studies
- Lead CAs
- New interviewing format
- Monthly training topics:
  - Learning theory concepts: retrieval practice, spacing and interleaving
  - Exam review protocols and best practices
  - How to help students without merely giving answers
  - How to help first-year students prepare for final exams

Course Topics

- Group learning philosophy
- Team building
- Creating community
- Failure and mindset
- Ethics and leadership
- Cultural competency
- Building connections with peers and instructors
- Flipped classrooms
- Socratic Method
- Creating independent learners

Assessment

- Peer-to-peer
- Observations
- Sign ins
- Professor feedback
- Student feedback

Lessons Learned

- How to talk about it
- Importance of multi-pronged marketing approach
- Setting expectations
- Adjusting vs. staying-the-course

Best Practices

- Clear and consistent expectations

- Training for CAs

- Instructor and program involvement
  - Instructors can tailor to a degree

- CSS is part of every conversation