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FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

The Trusted Expert and Internationally Recognized Leader
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Conferences and Continuing Education | Research and Assessment | Publications

The Role of Peer Leaders in the First-Year Experience:
Learning from Research Data
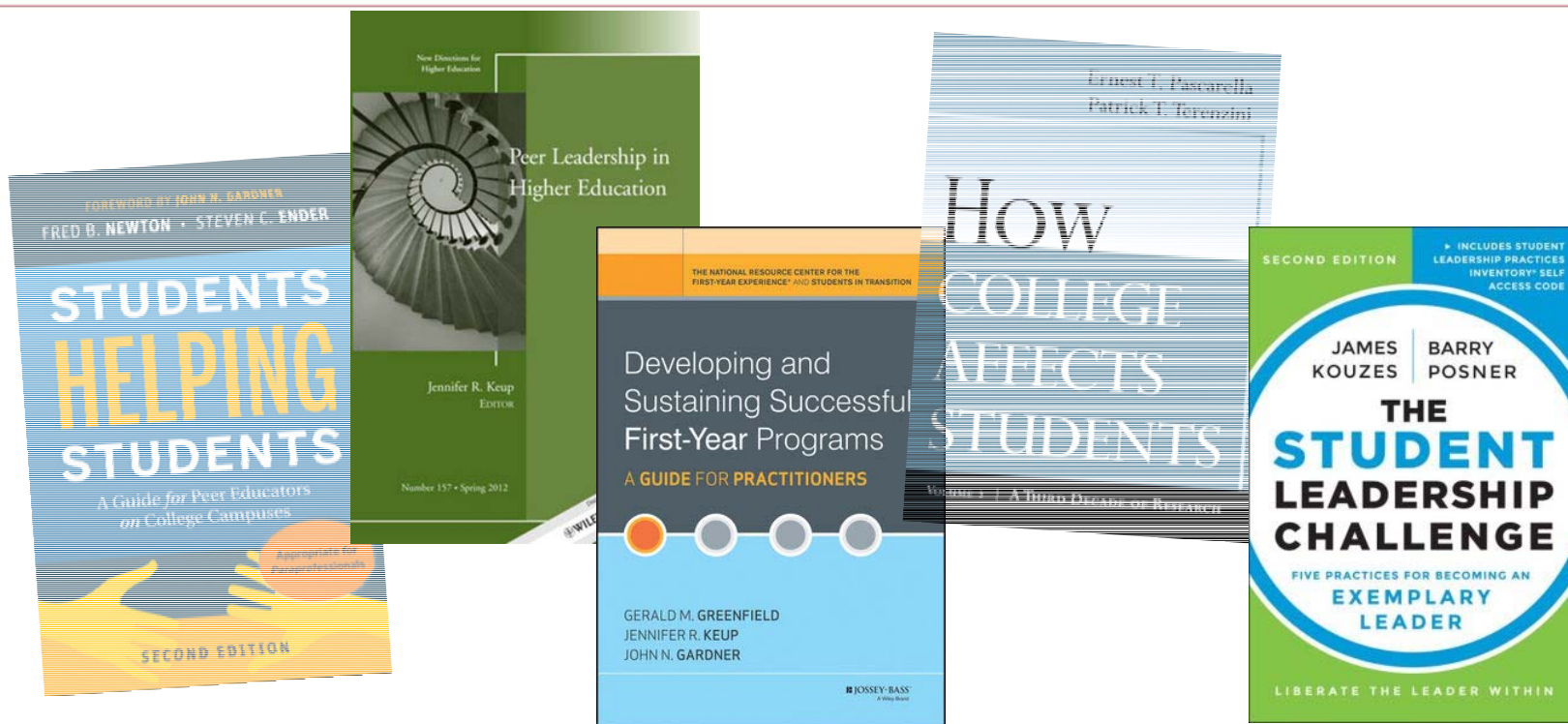
Jennifer R. Keup, Director

2014 European First-Year Experience Conference

Nottingham Trent University

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June 11, 2014

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Introduction

BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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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*)

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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

OF THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE & STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

Volume 24, Number 2

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® & Students in Transition

University of South Carolina

- "**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

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Dear Student,

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina is conducting a research study on the peer leader experience and would like to invite you to participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a student who has been involved in one or more peer leader experiences on your campus.

The purpose of this research is to gather information students' involvement and experiences as peer leaders. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a 10 - 15 minute survey about your involvement in peer leadership roles and the impact this involvement has had on your educational experience.

By participating in this research, you are providing information that will contribute to the knowledge of peer leadership in Higher Education. This information can be used to better and expand peer leadership experiences for others in both student and professional form.

Your participation is confidential. The information from this study will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The results from this study will be reported in the aggregate and participants will not receive any further contact after completing the survey. This survey will take place at approximately 60 campuses across the United States and will be administered to an estimated average of approximately 1,000 students at each campus.

Participation in this survey research allows you to enter a drawing for one of four $500 airline flight vouchers or one of 10 $100 American Express gift cards. At the conclusion of the survey, the website will ask for your information to be entered into the drawing. This information will be kept confidential and will be destroyed upon the conclusion of the distribution of the prizes. You are eligible for the prizes whether or not you complete the survey.

Your participation is in this study is your decision and you may choose to withdraw from this study at any time. Participation, non-participation, or withdrawal from this study will not have an impact on your grades, credit, or any other benefit to which you might otherwise be entitled.

We would be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. If you have study related questions or problems, you may contact us by phone at 803-777-2134 or by e-mail at NRCrsrch@mailbox.sc.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803-777-7095.

University of South Carolina

8% Complete

The purpose of this survey is to gather information about your experience as a peer leader. We define a peer leader as an **undergraduate student** who has been selected to serve as a mentor, educator, or advisor to other students through a position with a campus-run organization.

As you answer each question, please reflect on your experience(s) as a peer leader. Your responses will be used to help researchers study and better understand the peer leadership experience. All individual responses will be kept confidential. Responding to this survey will take approximately 10 - 15 minutes.

QUESTION 2
What college or university do you attend?

Status as a Peer Leader
We define a peer leader as an undergraduate student who has been selected to serve as a mentor, educator, or advisor to other students through a position with a campus-run organization.

QUESTION 3
Are you currently serving as a peer leader?

○ Yes
○ No
○ I don't know

BACK   NEXT

Type of Peer Leader Experience(s)

QUESTION 4
What type of campus-based organization have you worked for as a peer leader, either currently or in the past? (Check all that apply)

☐ Athletics
☐ Academic - peer advisor
☐ Academic - Supplemental Instruction leader
☐ Academic - tutor
☐ Academic - other (e.g., teaching assistant, lab assistant)
☐ Admissions
☐ Campus activities
☐ Community service or service learning
☐ Counseling or mental health
☐ Financial literacy
☐ First-year experience
☐ Greek life (i.e., social fraternity or sorority)
☐ International student office
☐ Judicial affairs or student conduct
☐ Multicultural affairs
☐ Orientation (e.g., new student, extended, or summer orientation)
☐ Outdoor or recreational sports
☐ Physical health
☐ Religious

Methodology

2013 NATIONAL SURVEY OF PEER LEADERS

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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
- <u>Limitations</u>: 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)

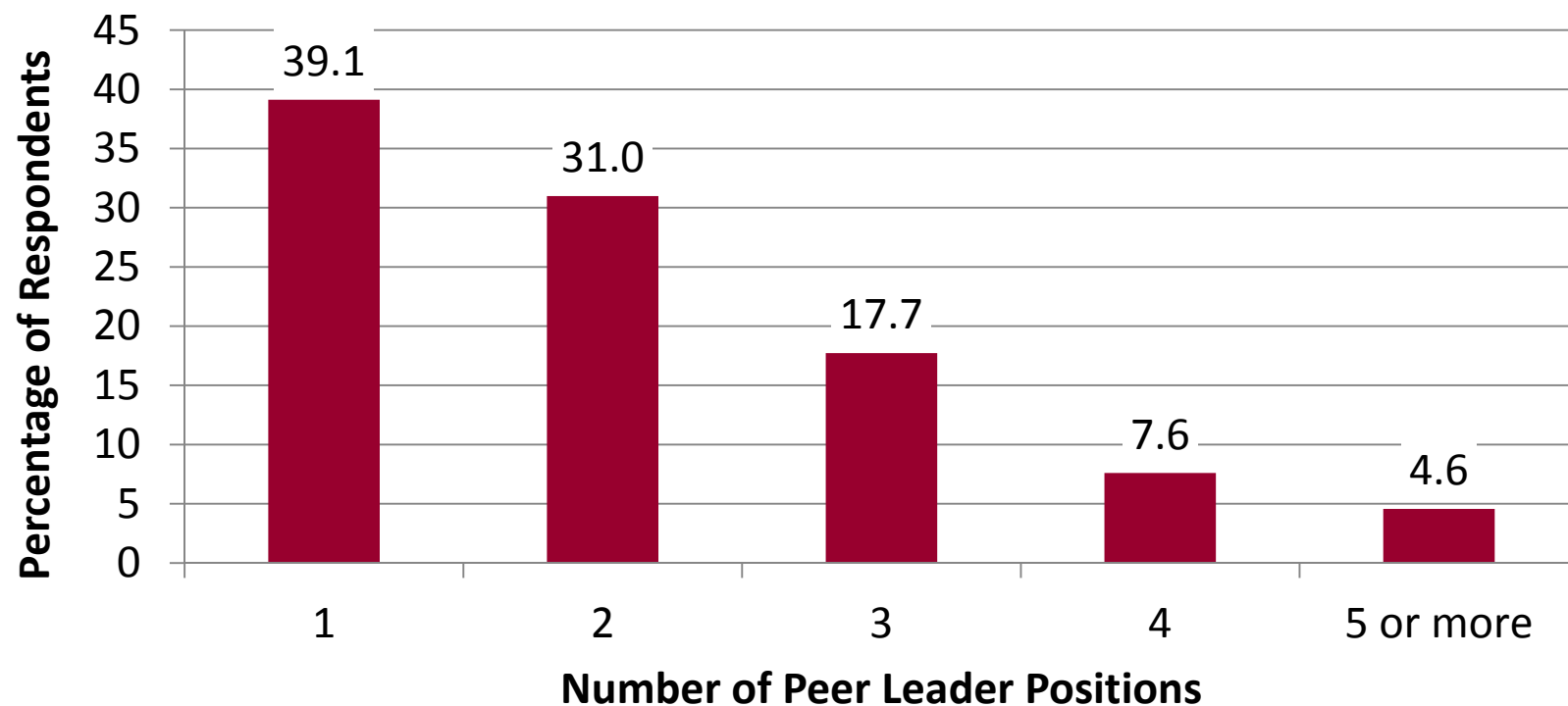| Peer Leader Experience	%
Student clubs and organization(s)	44.5
Residence Hall	28.9
First-Year Experience	28.6
Campus activities	28.5
Orientation	24.6
Academic - peer advisor	24.5
Community service or service learning	23.8
Academic - Tutor	23.4

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)

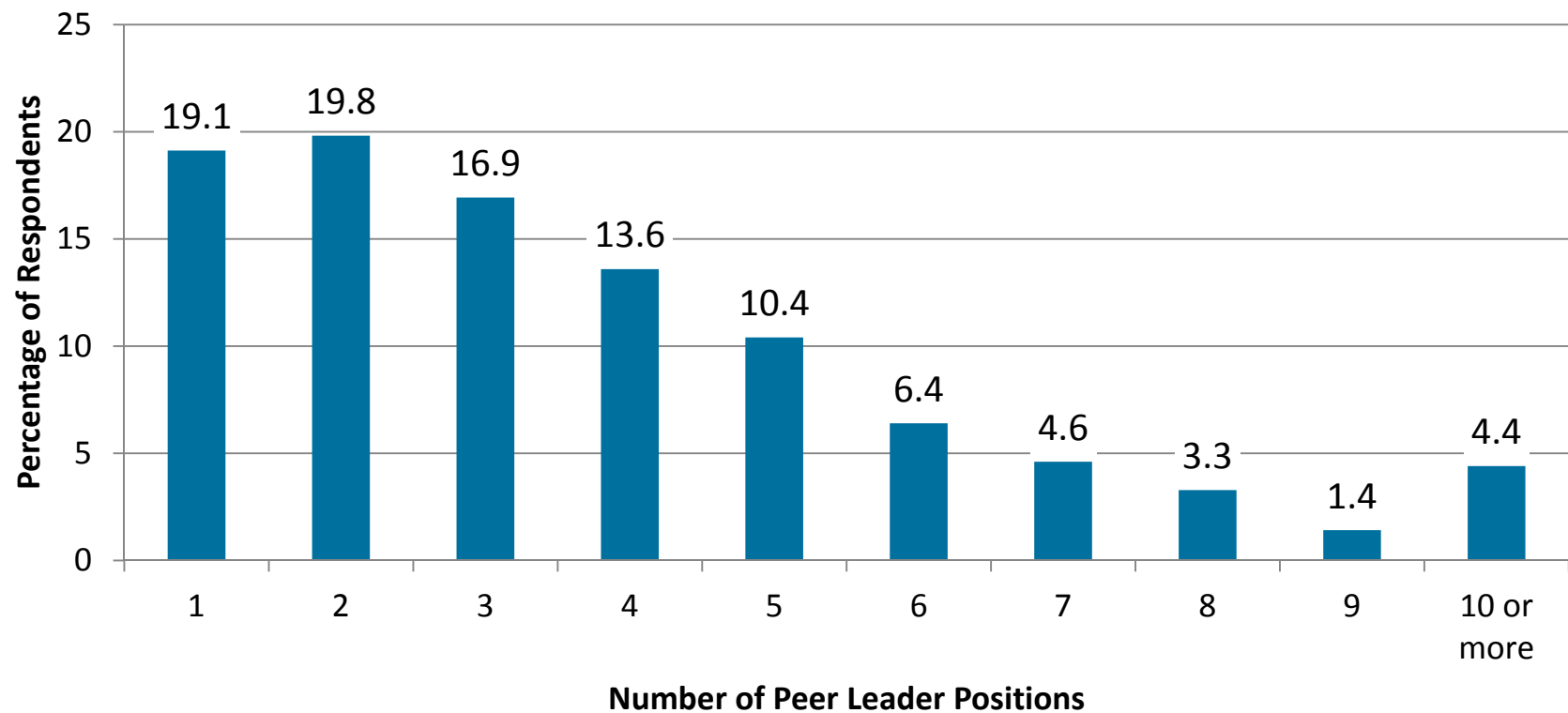| Peer Leader Experience	%
Athletics	9.5
Admissions	9.3
Religious	8.9
Academic-Supplemental Instruction leader	8.7
Multicultural affairs	5.4
Study abroad	5.2
Outdoor or recreational sports	4.3
Counseling or mental health	3.1
Student productions or media	2.8
Judicial affairs or student conduct	2.6
Physical health	2.6
International student office	2.2
Financial literacy	.8

Number of Peer Leader Experiences

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

Bar chart showing Percentage of Respondents vs. Number of Peer Leader Positions:
- 1: 39.1
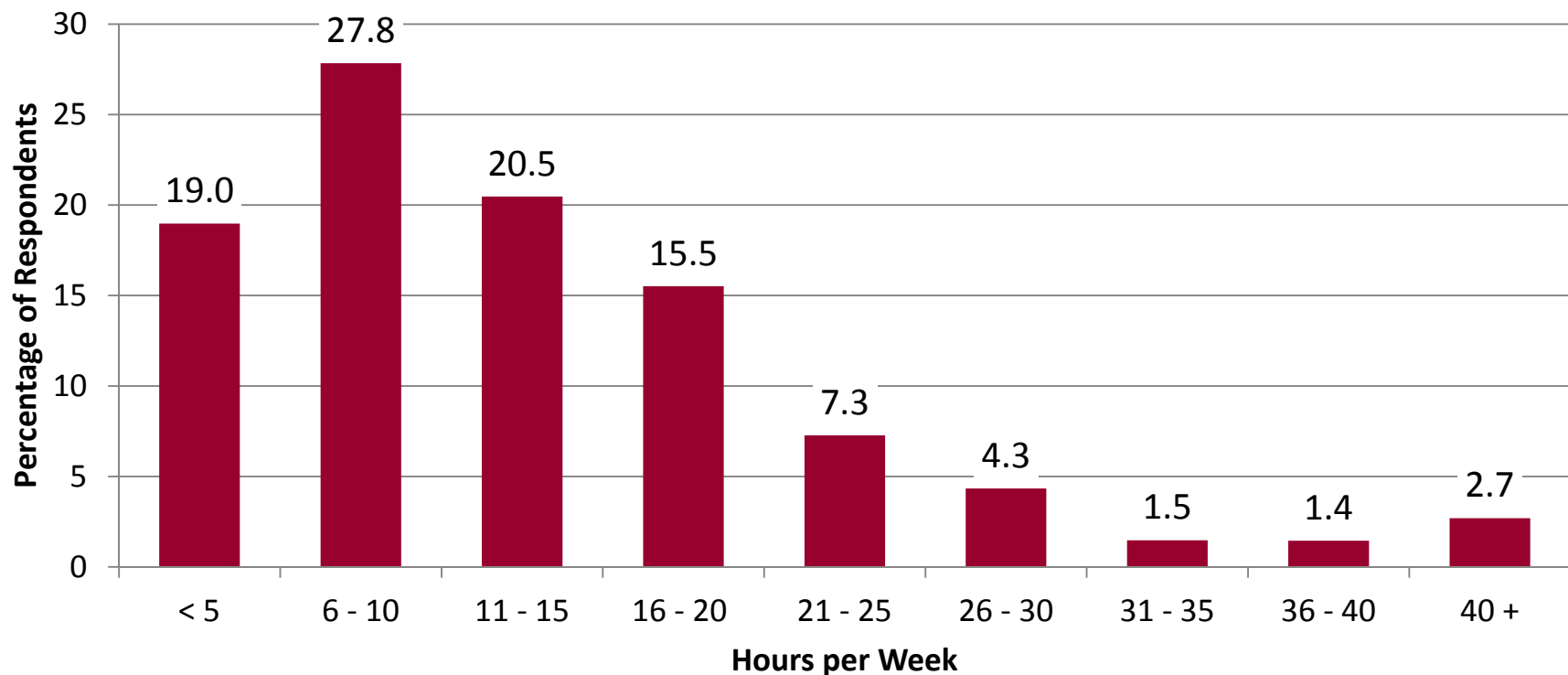- 2: 31.0
- 3: 17.7
- 4: 7.6
- 5 or more: 4.6
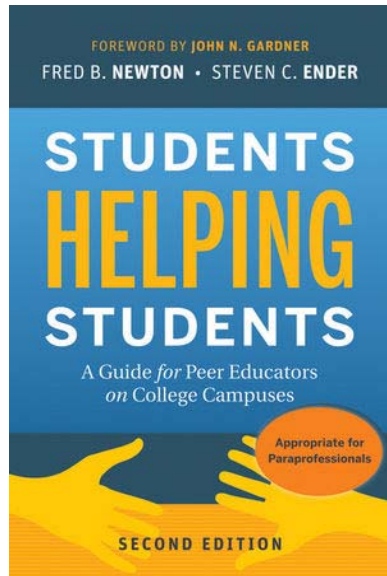
Number of Peer Leader Experiences

Including any current positions, how many total peer leader positions have you held during your college experience? (n = 4,016)

Chart: Percentage of Respondents vs. Number of Peer Leader Positions

Number of Peer Leader Positions	Percentage of Respondents
1	19.1
2	19.8
3	16.9
4	13.6
5	10.4
6	6.4
7	4.6
8	3.3
9	1.4
10 or more	4.4

"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)
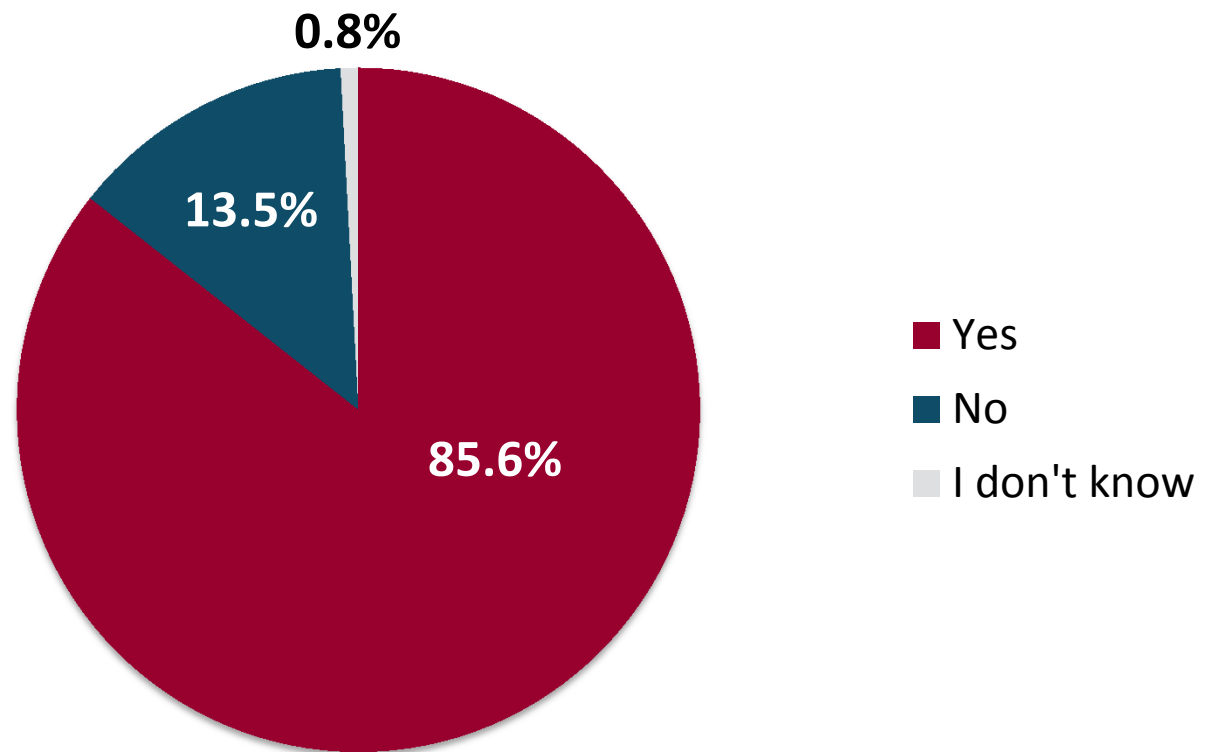
Application: (86.4%)
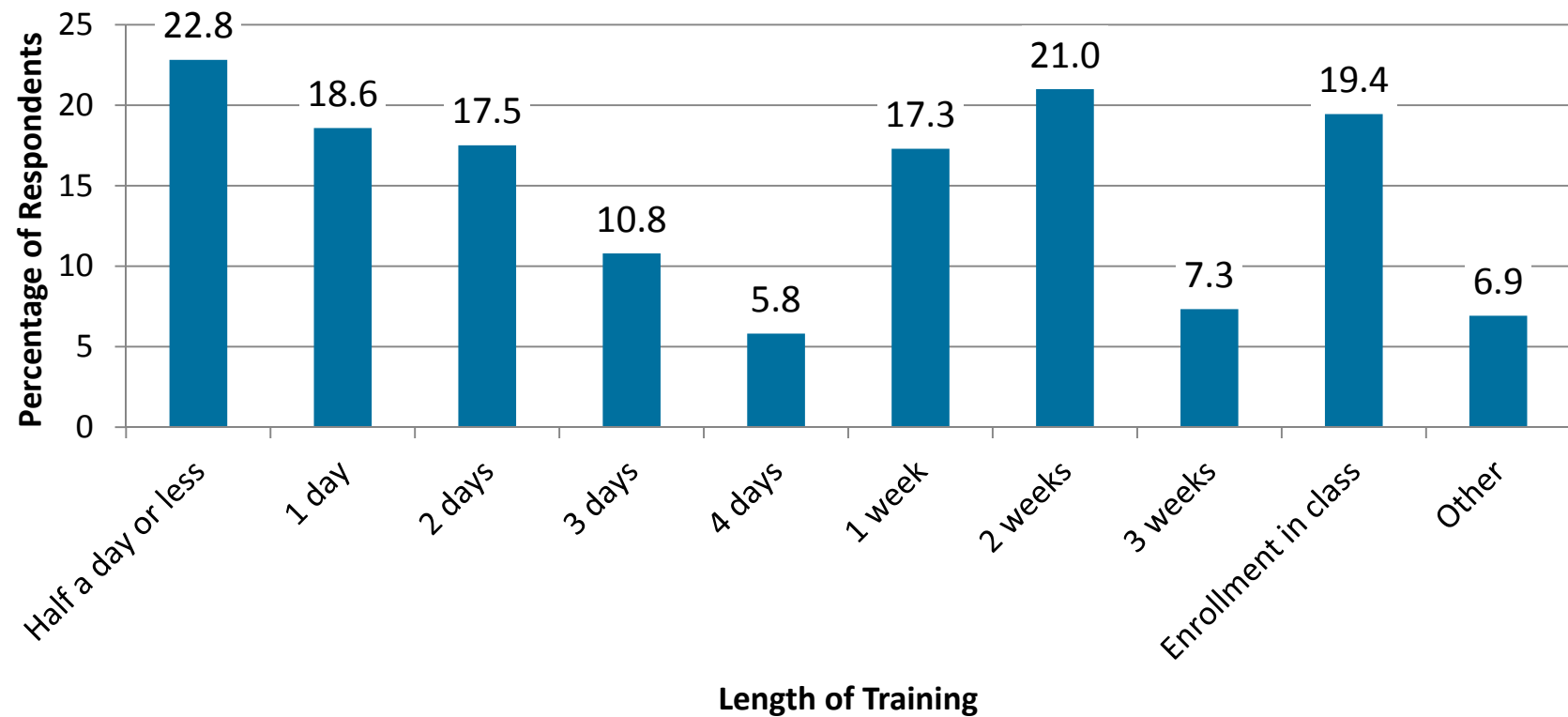
Election: (38.8%)

Nomination: (35.9%)

Other: (2.8%)

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Training

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

0.8%

13.5%

85.6%

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

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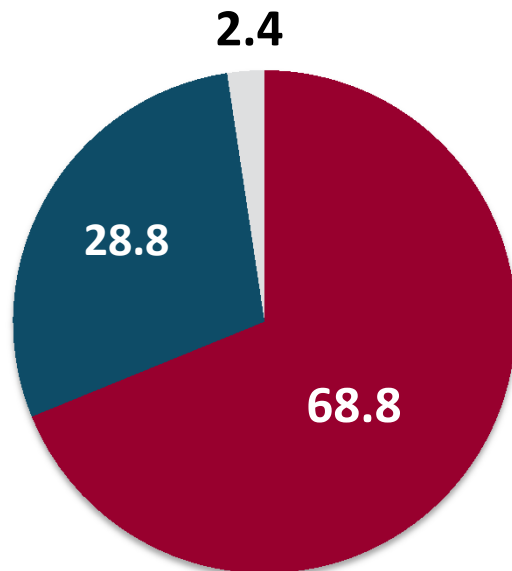FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
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Training

How long was the initial formal training for your current and/or previous peer leader position(s)? (n = 3,353)

Y-axis: **Percentage of Respondents** (0 to 25)

X-axis: **Length of Training**

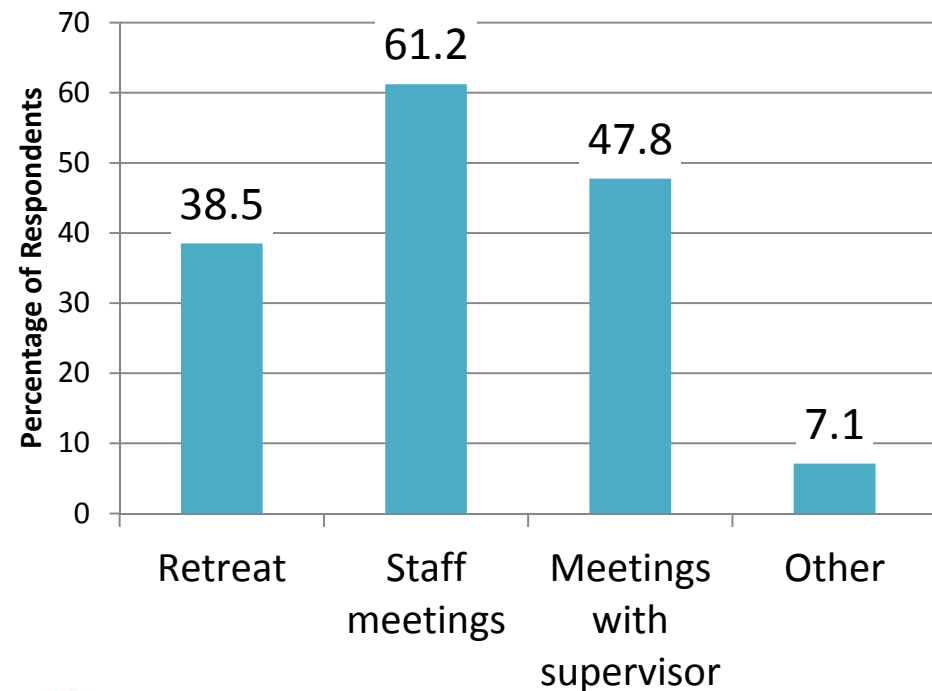| Length of Training	Percentage
Half a day or less	22.8
1 day	18.6
2 days	17.5
3 days	10.8
4 days	5.8
1 week	17.3
2 weeks	21.0
3 weeks	7.3
Enrollment in class	19.4
Other	6.9

Training

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

2.4

28.8

68.8

■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know

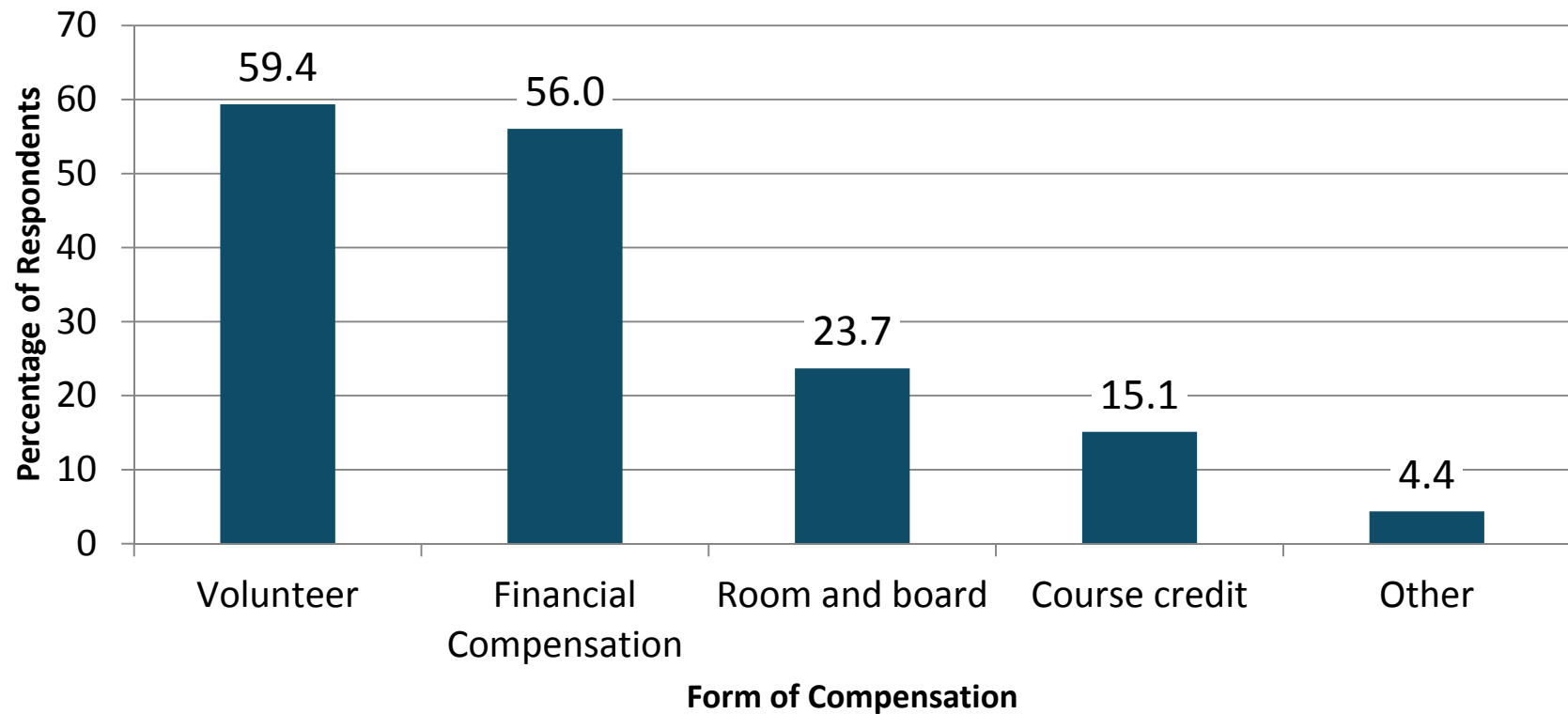**What type of additional ongoing formal training did you receive? (n = 2,303)**

Percentage of Respondents

70	
60	61.2
50	47.8
40	38.5
30	
20	
10	7.1
0	

Retreat — Staff meetings — Meetings with supervisor — Other

Compensation

What compensation did or do you receive for your work as a peer leader? (n = 3,942)

Bar chart — Percentage of Respondents by Form of Compensation:

- Volunteer: 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

Skill Development	% Increased
Leadership	87.3
Interpersonal communication	82.5
Teamwork	77.5
Time management	73.6
Project management	72.9
Organization	71.5
Presentation	67.5
Critical thinking	65.8
Written communication	53.4

Outcomes of PLEs

| Undergraduate Experience	% Increased
Knowledge of campus resources	83.6
Meaningful interaction with peers	81.2
Feeling of belonging at institution	76.6
Meaningful interaction with staff members	75.9
Interaction with people from different backgrounds	75.6
Meaningful interaction with faculty	73.3
Understanding people from different backgrounds	72.9
Desire to engage in continuous learning	71.8
Desire to persist at institution	68.9

Outcomes of PLEs

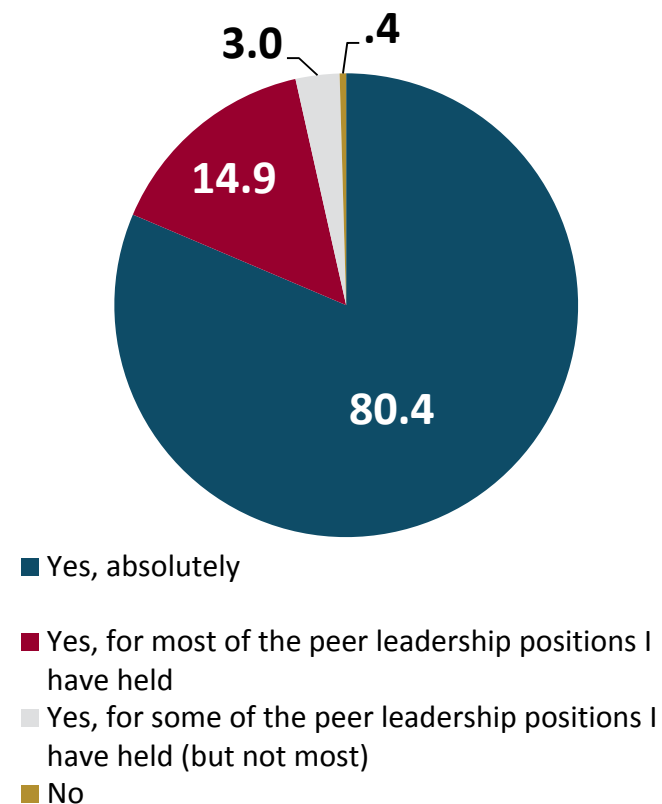| Employability Outcomes	% Increased
Building professional interpersonal relationships	77.9
Applying knowledge to a real-world setting	72.7
Bringing together info from different places	71.2
Providing direction through persuasion	67.8
Analyzing a problem from new perspectives	65.8
Expectations for success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

Outcomes of PLEs

Academic Performance	% Increased
Academic skill development	39.9
Overall academic performance	23.8
Grade point average	19.0
# of credit hours completed each term	15.1
Facilitate timely graduation	1.8

Satisfaction with PLEs

How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your peer leadership experiences?
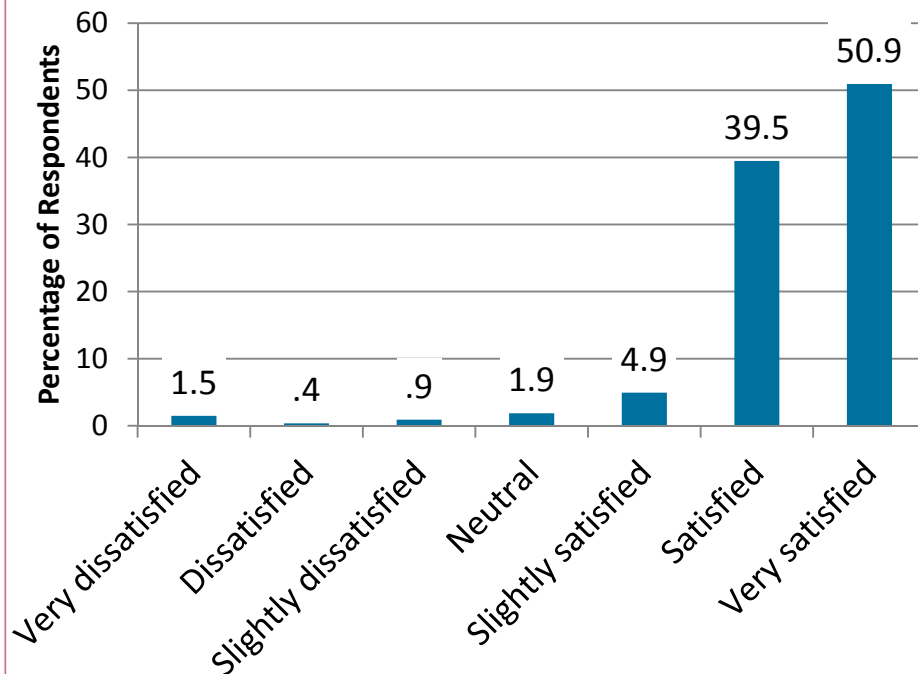
Would you recommend being a peer leader to other students?

- Yes, absolutely
- Yes, for most of the peer leadership positions I have held
- Yes, for some of the peer leadership positions I have held (but not most)
- No

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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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