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Exploring the (High) Impact of Peer Leadership Experiences: Findings from the 2014 South African Survey of Peer Leaders

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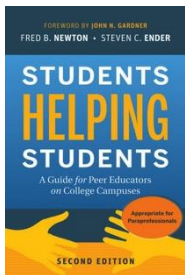
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South African National
First Year Experience and
Students in Transition
Conference | 21 May 2015

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."

(*Ender & Newton, 2000; Newton & Ender, 2010*)

FOREWORD BY **JOHN N. GARDNER**
FRED B. **NEWTON** • STEVEN C. **ENDER**

STUDENTS
HELPING
STUDENTS
A Guide *for* Peer Educators
on College Campuses

Appropriate for
Paraprofessionals

SECOND EDITION

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What's in a Name?

- **Peer mentor**
  - More personal
  - Typically one-on-one relationship
  - Occurs over an extended period of time
  - Guidance beyond academic development
  - Intensive
- **Student paraprofessionals**
  - Paid position

- **Peer educator**
  - Narrower in focus
  - Academic development
  - Frequently includes teaching functions
  - More specific range of time
- **Peer leader**
  - Most comprehensive term
  - Promoting positive and ethical change

(*Cuseo, 2010*)

Method - Data Source:
2014 South African Survey of Peer Leaders

- Pilot in 2009 in US
- 2013 US Survey of Peer Leaders
- 2014/15 International Survey of Peer Leaders
  – Australia
  – Canada
  – New Zealand
  – United Kingdom
  – South Africa

Participating Institutions:
2014 South African Survey of Peer Leaders

- Central University of Technology
- Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
- Stellenbosch University
- University of the Free State
- University of Johannesburg
- University of KwaZulu-Natal

How are Peer Leaders being used on your campus?

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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 = 466)	
Peer Leader Experience	**%**
Academic: Peer tutor	62.4
Academic: Other (e.g., teaching assistant, lab assistant, demi)	25.1
Academic: Peer mentors	23.4
First-year experience	15.0
Academic: Supplemental Instruction leader	13.9
Academic: Senior tutor	13.5
Academic: Peer buddies	12.2
Orientation (e.g., new student, extended, or summer orientation)	10.1

Less Common PL Sponsors

What type of campus-based organization have you worked for as a peer leader, either currently or in the past? (n = 466)

Peer Leader Experience	%
House Committees	9.4
Student clubs and societies	8.6
Community service or service-learning	7.9
Student wellness or wellbeing	4.5
Sports Clubs	4.3
Other (please specify)	4.1
Student Government-SRC	3.2
Inter-university sports	2.8
Cross cultural activities	2.6
RAA	2.4
Admissions	2.1
Outdoor or recreational sports	2.1
International student office	1.3
Study abroad or exchange	0.9
Judicial affairs or student conduct	0.6
Financial literacy	0.4

Difference in Benefits Indicate Difference in Interests

- Benefits of the Use of Peer Leaders to:
  - Programs
    - Improved student outcomes
    - Share the workload with instructors
    - Greater connection between instructor and students as Peer Leader forms the bridge
  - Students
    - Improved student outcomes
    - Increased attention
    - More opportunities for student interventions
  - Peer Leaders
    - Training and ongoing support
    - Engagement with faculty and staff
    - Challenging duties and responsibilities
    - Reflection and self-appraisal

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What are some of the benefits you have seen to the students who have engaged with peer educators, mentors, leaders?

Why Does Peer Leadership Work?

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Why Does Peer Leadership Work?

"The student's peer group is the **single most potent source of influence** on growth and development during the undergraduate years"
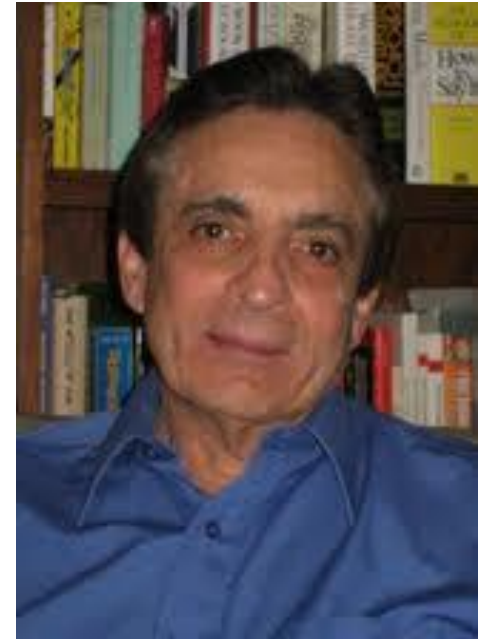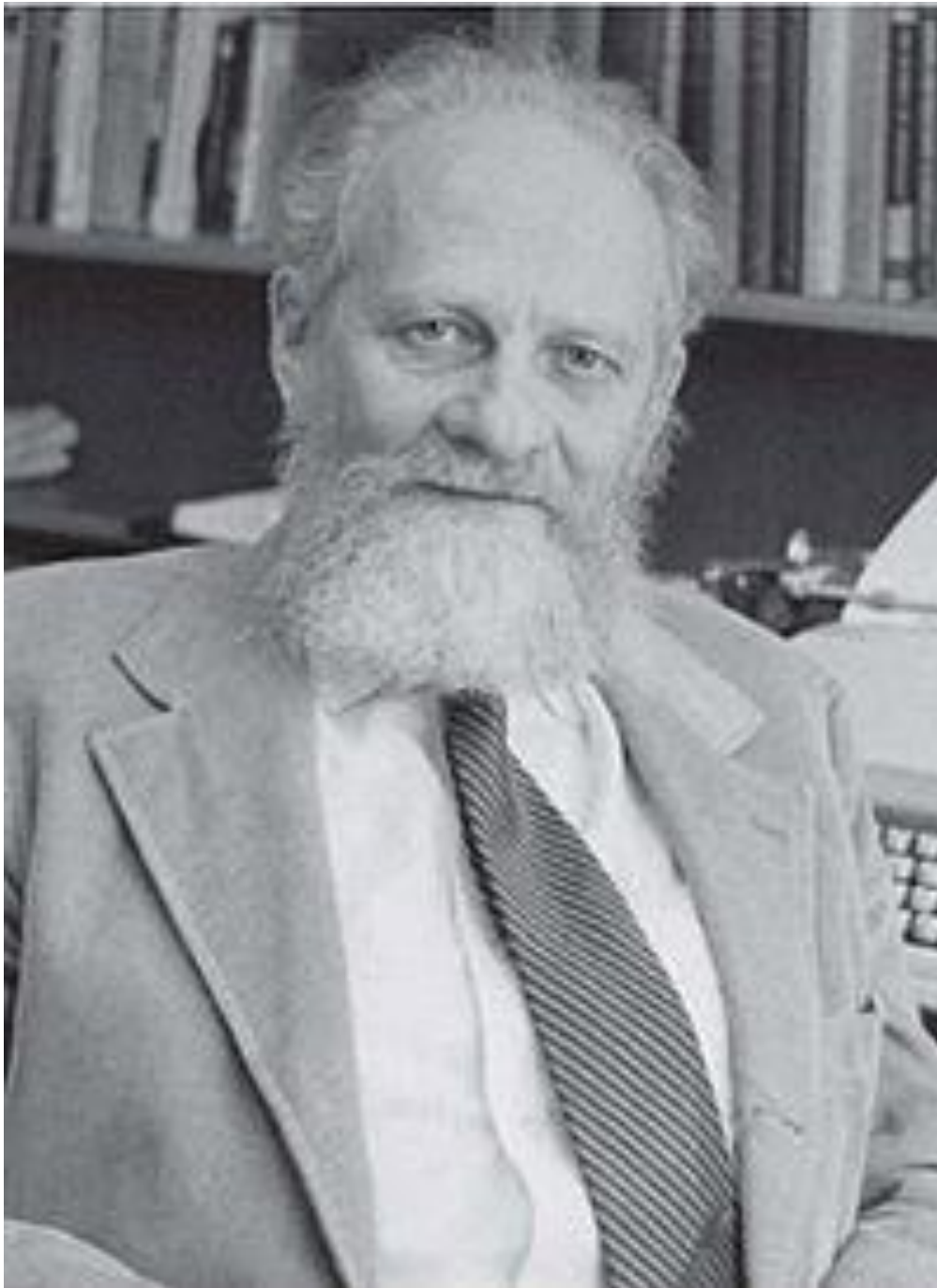(*Astin, 1993*)
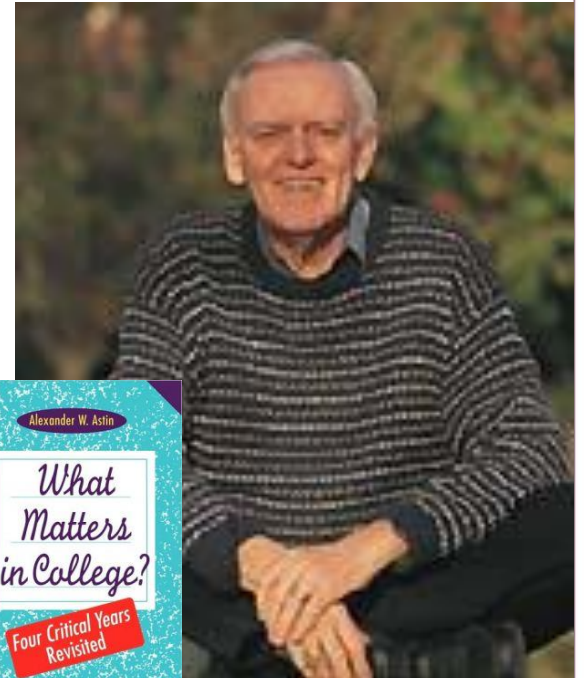
Why Does Peer Leadership Work?

Peer leaders are empowered to exert influence in a less intimidating way than staff or faculty.

(*Cuseo, 1991*)

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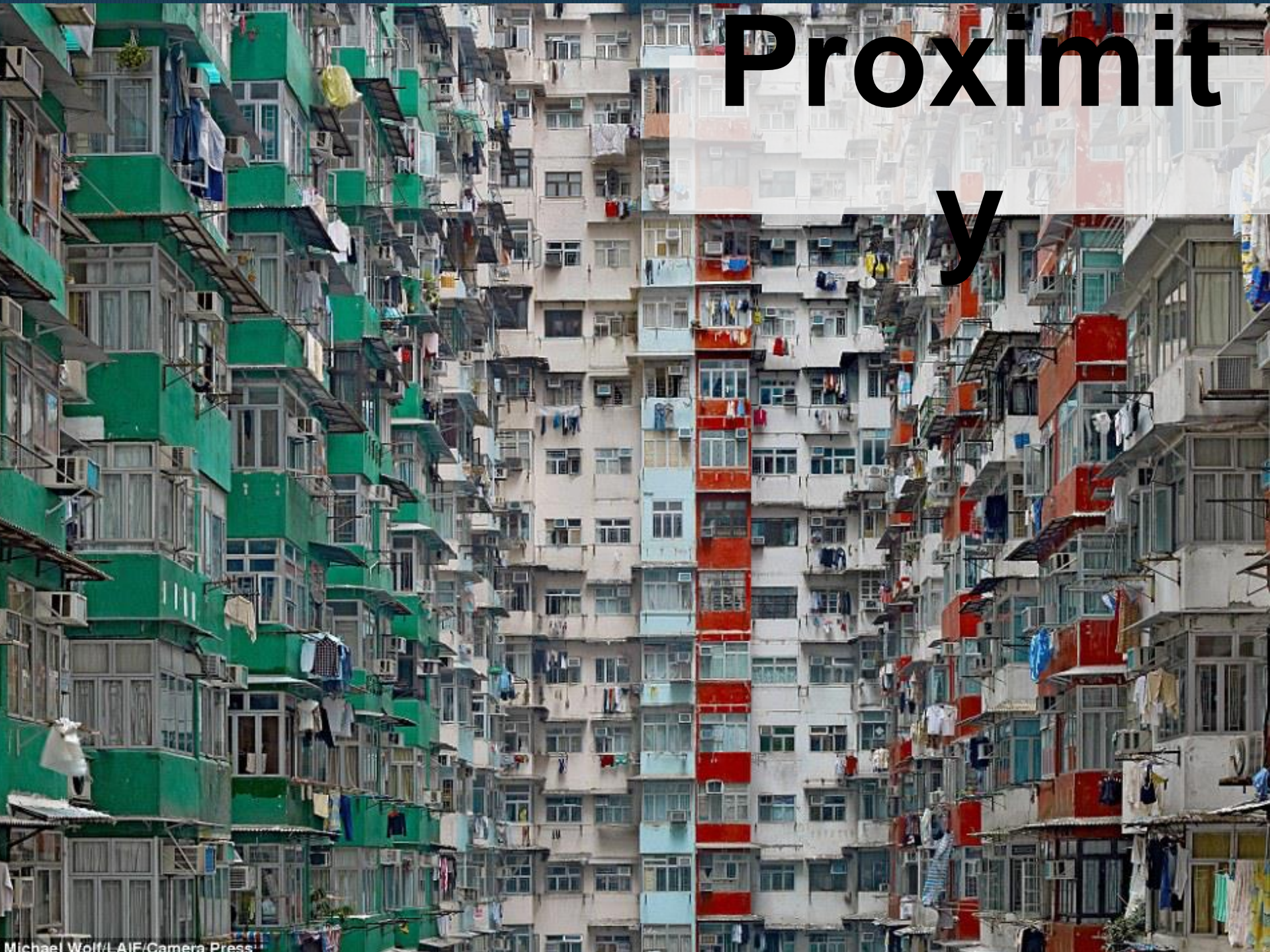UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Why Does Peer Leadership Work?

"To Teach is to Learn Twice."

(Joseph Joubert, a very long time ago)

JOUBERT

Dissatisfied

Sociologist Peter Blau

•Social networks form based on:
–Proximity
–Shared Interest

Blau (1977); Blau & Schwartz (1984)

Proximity

Proximity

- Physical
- Age
- Culture
- Knowledge

Peer Leaders Bridge Gap in Proximity

Over **85%** of Peer Leaders reported increased meaningful interaction with:

- Peers
- Student Affairs/Support Staff
- Professors or

Over 90%

of Peer Leaders reported increased:
- Knowledge about
- Interaction with
- Understanding of
people from backgrounds different from their own

Why Peer Leadership Works:
In Their Own Words - Proximity

"Have had difficulties in my first year without guidance, I felt the need for an African child to be assisted is highly in demand if not imperative."

"Making change in the black (race) community, as I run most of my sessions in isiZulu."

Why Peer Leadership Works:
In Their Own Words - Proximity

"I wanted to help first year students cope with their new environment (university) and responsibilities with regard to their academic studies and also help them achieve their dreams without feeling any pressure or signs of giving up due to any personal or academic reasons."

Why Peer Leadership Works:
In Their Own Words - Proximity

"Being a peer leader helps me to see what the students are going through and how they are coping with the subject matter. Based on what I observe I speak to the relevant lecturers so we can discuss plans of action. For example, if I see students aren't understanding a topic the are meant to be studying for an upcoming assessment, I will speak to the lecturer may then decide to hold off testing that particular topic for the time being. I feel that peer leaders help to serve as the bridge between the students and the [instructors]."

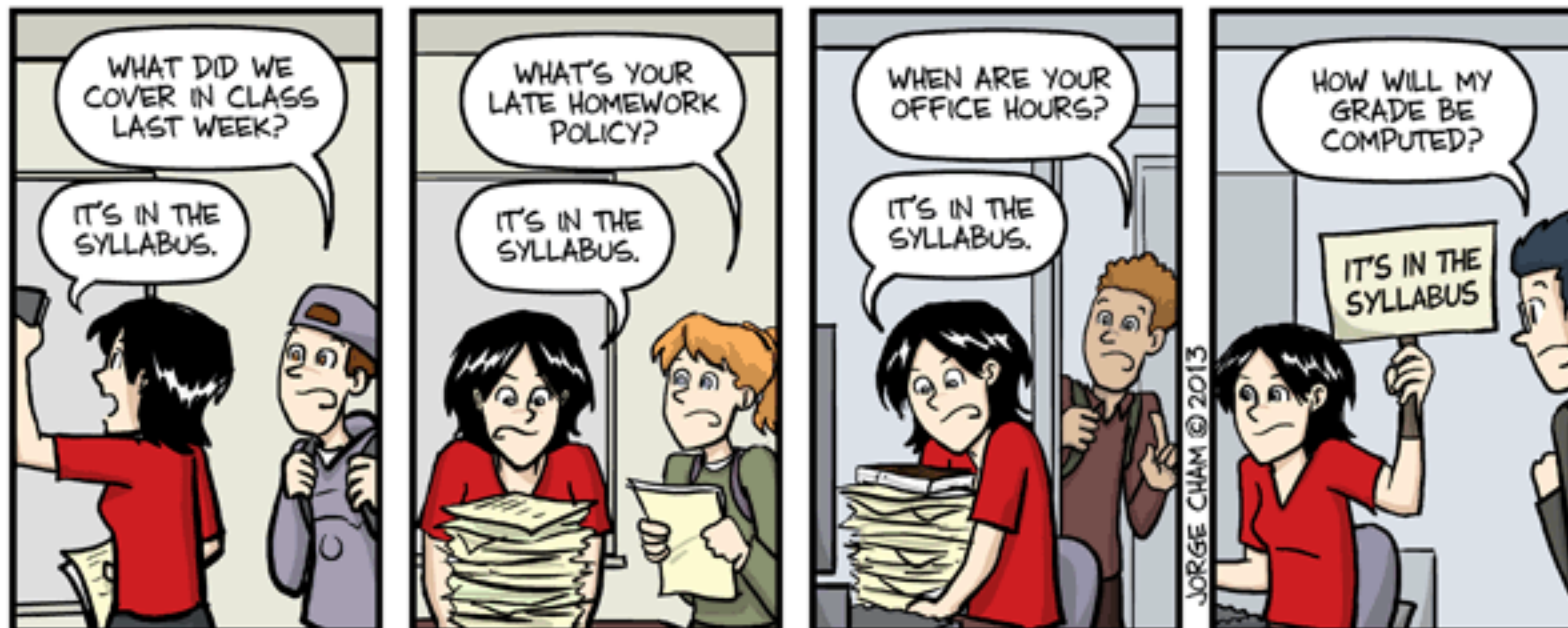# •Social networks form based on:

–Proximity

–Shared Interest

Blau (1977); Blau & Schwartz (1984)

Shared Interest

IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS

This message brought to you by every instructor that ever lived.

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM
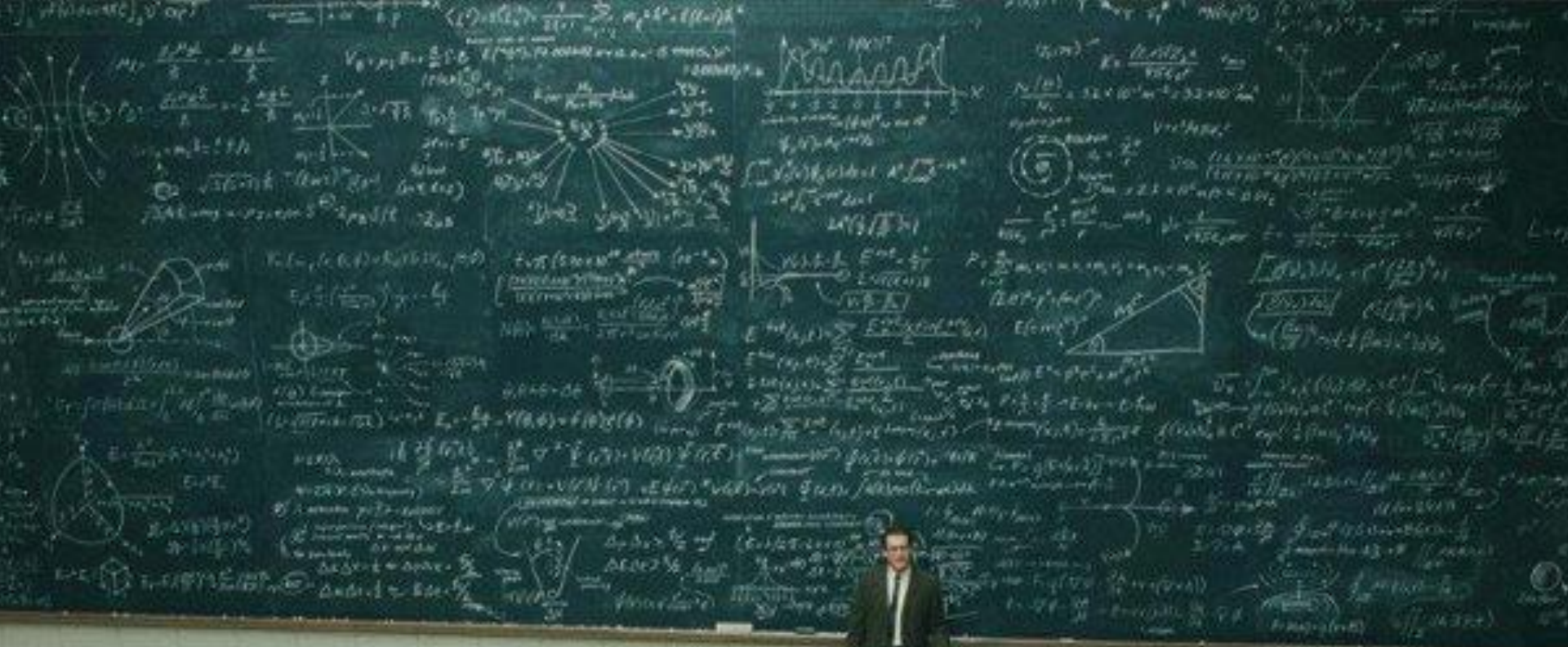
Shared Interest?

Instructors

- Learning
  - Mastery of concepts working toward expertise

  - Process of learning

  - Relativistic
    - Multiple paths to arrive at an answer

Students

- Learning
  - Mastery of concepts working toward passing mark

  - Product of learning

  - Dualistic
    - Right and wrong answers

Difference in Benefits Indicate Difference in Interests

- Benefits of the Use of Peer Leaders to:
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  - Students
    - Improved student outcomes
    - Increased attention
    - More opportunities for student interventions
  - Peer Leaders
    - Training and ongoing support
    - Engagement with faculty and staff
    - Challenging duties and responsibilities
    - Reflection and self-appraisal

Differences in Interest:
In Their Own Words

What motivated you to take on a Peer Leader position?

- "Money."

- "Mostly to earn some cash."

- "Money and work experience in an academic field."

- "Financial reward and teaching students."

Differences in Interest:
In Their Own Words

What else would you like to share about your experience as a peer leader?

- "In dealing with faculty you learn there are many people who aren't doing their jobs and you learn that a university's main focus isn't necessarily students."

Opportunities to Find Common Ground: In Their Own Words

What motivated you to take on a Peer Leader position?

- "I enjoy helping others."
- "I believe in empowering others."
- "I wanted to make a difference in the lives of students."

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Opportunities to Find Common Ground: In Their Own Words

What motivated you to take on a Peer Leader position?

- "At first my plan was to use a tutoring position to gain experience that would benefit a career of teaching. My choice of reapplication for the job, however, stems from the enjoyment of teaching and enteracting with the [students]."

- "…It motivated me to be more involved in community service and learning for the benefit of society as a whole rather than for personal growth."

Metacognition
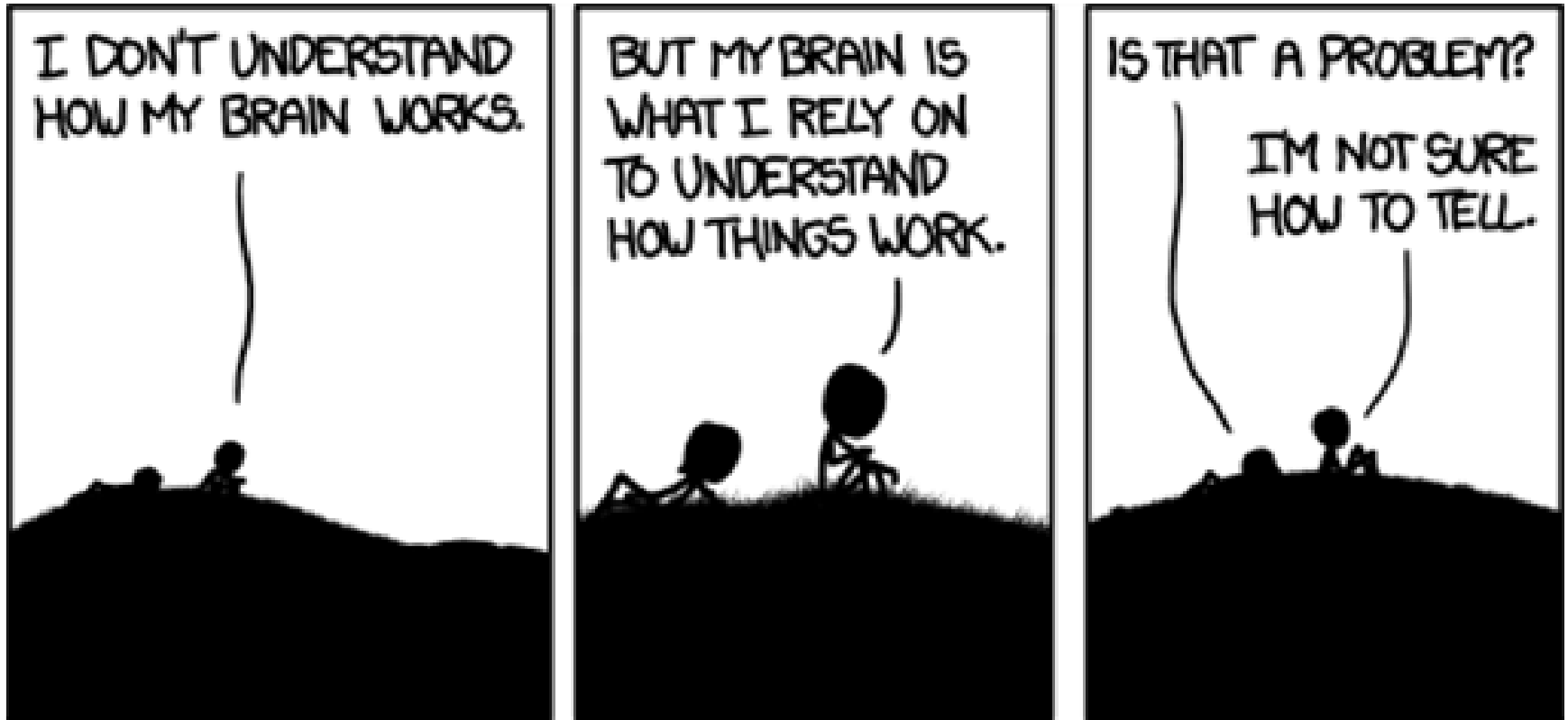
Why Does Peer Leadership Work?

- "To Teach is to Learn Twice."

- Joseph Joubert

Why Does Peer Leadership Work?

- "To be a Peer Leader is to Learn how to Learn Twice."

- Dallin George Young

young

Peer Leadership as Metacognition: In Their Own Words

"I like assisting other people as that also helps me to be a critical thinker, and also because I think that there is nothing better than interacting with different people from different backgrounds especially those who speak different languages."

Peer Leadership as Metacognition: In Their Own Words

"Also, it is a good way to keep what you've learned in previous years fresh in your mind. Sometimes relatively 'simple' details can help you solve more complex problems."

How do we develop metacognition in our peer leaders?

Characteristics of HIPs
in Peer Leadership

- Creates an investment of time and energy
- High expectations
- Demands reflection and integrated learning
- Includes frequent feedback
- Public demonstration of competence
- Exposure to diverse perspectives
- Includes interaction with faculty and peers about substantive matters
- Real-world applications

High-Impact Practices

- Educationally Purposeful Environments
    - Teaching and learning practices
    - Take many different forms
    - Depend on learner characteristics
    - Depend on institutional priorities and contexts

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SA Survey of Peer Leaders: Educationally Purposeful Environments

- Peer leaders report indicators of high expectations
  - Most training lasts for 2 days or less
    - Many have training experiences of a week or longer
    - However 9% report not receiving training
  - Majority report ongoing training
    - Particularly during in-service training such as workshops or meetings with supervisors
  - Significant proportion (84%) receive wages for their work
    - 1 in 5 do not receive compensation (i.e., volunteer)

SA Survey of Peer Leaders: Educationally Purposeful Environments

- Peer leaders report engagement in experiences
  - Largest concentration of respondents reported spending 10 hours per week or less on PL responsibilities
  - 9 in 10 peer leaders held one or two positions at once
- However, some are over-involved
  - 8% have held 4 or more PL roles at one time
  - 4.5% spent more than 31 hours per week on PL duties

High-Impact Practices

- Lead to Increases in Important Student Outcomes
  - Student engagement
  - Academic achievement (e.g. avg. first-year marks)
  - Deep learning
  - Student persistence and retention

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What benefits have you seen for students who engage as Peer Leaders?

What Happens to Peer Leaders?

Employability Outcomes	% Increased
Building professional interpersonal relationships	93.3
Analyzing a problem from new perspectives	91.8
Creating innovative approaches to a task	91.5
Bringing together info from different places	90.0
Providing direction through persuasion	88.6
Applying knowledge to a real-world setting	87.8
Engaging in ethical decision-making	87.1
Expectations of success in a FT job after graduation	83.1
Sharing ideas with others in writing	82.1

What Happens to Peer Leaders?

Skill Development	% Increased
Critical thinking	95.5
Leadership	94.5
Adaptability	91.9
Interpersonal communication	91.4
Problem solving	90.2
Decision making	89.7
Teamwork	89.5
Presentation	86.9
Organizational	86.4
Time management	86.2
Creativity	83.8
Project management	81.4
Written communication	79.5
Academic	71.6

Peer Leader Outcomes

"That it teaches you a lot in terms of time management, communication skills, work quality and priority settings. You need to be able to do more than one thing at a time and leading fellow students teaches you all that…"

"It's not as easy as everyone thinks it is from the outside, there are times when one would feel like throwing in the towel because of it, but then again having to think of the people you helping and grooming, you get back your senses and carry on. Very interesting experience indeed."

Peer Leader Outcomes

"It has grown me as an individual. I am now able to speak publicly, my interpersonal relationships have improved and my thought processes have been expanded or are intrigued. My eyes and ears have been opened, in a sense that I now look at different things/situations/people in various ways."

Peer Leader Outcomes

"I'm suffering from social anxiety disorder, being a peer leader has helped to face some of my fears like stage fright, now I am able to stand in front of a group of people and give a presentation."

Takeaways - Overall

- Peer leaders report satisfaction with the experience
  - Nearly all respondents (98%) would recommend most peer leadership positions to other students

To Sum Up

- Peer Leaders serve as a bridge between Students and Faculty
  - Proximity
  - Shared Interest
- This arrangement (if done well) can lead to development of Metacognition in PL
- PL overwhelmingly report improved outcomes

What to Do to Make Peer Leadership Work: Proximity

- How to develop proximity between peer leaders and faculty/staff:
  - Training
  - Ongoing in-service training and supervision
- How to develop proximity between peer leaders and students:
  - Communication skills (Oral and Written)
  - Leadership skills

What to Do to Make Peer Leadership Work: Shared Interest

- How to develop shared interest between peer leaders and faculty/staff:
  - Making real-world connections
  - Setting reasonably high expectations
- How to develop shared interest between peer leaders and students:
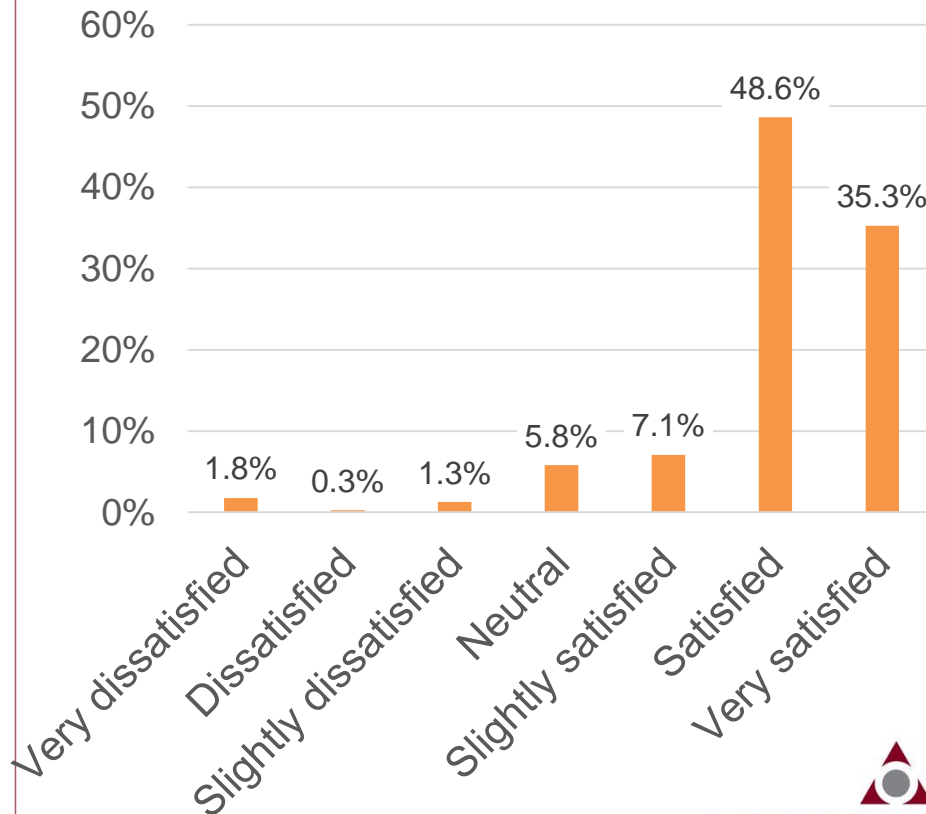 - Exposure to diverse perspectives
  - Teamwork

What to Do to Make Peer Leadership Work: Metacognition

- How to develop metacognition in peer leaders and faculty/staff:
  - Interaction around substantive matters
  - Reflection
  - Feedback
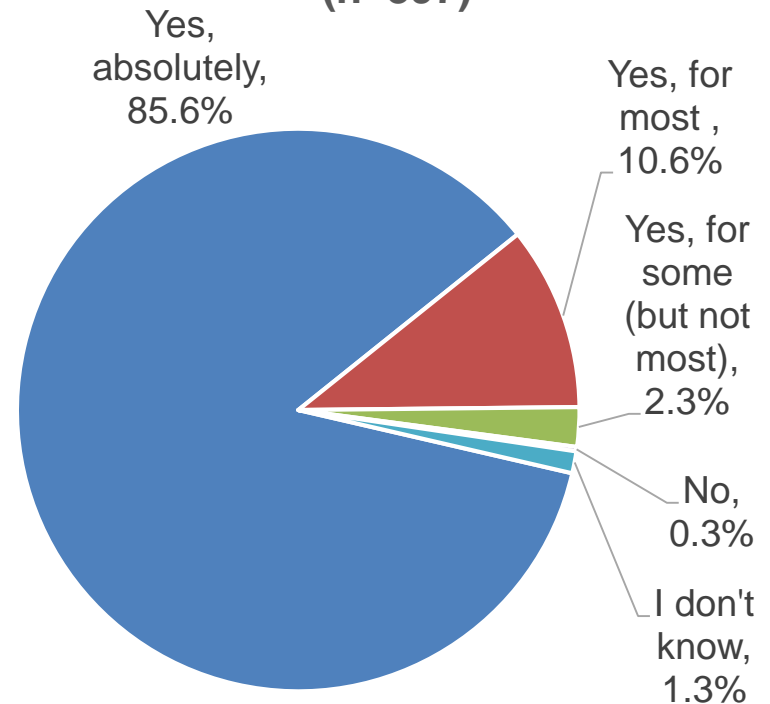 - Project management skills
  - Time

Satisfaction with Peer Leadership Experiences

How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your peer leadership experiences? (n=397)

- Very dissatisfied: 1.8%
- Dissatisfied: 0.3%
- Slightly dissatisfied: 1.3%
- Neutral: 5.8%
- Slightly satisfied: 7.1%
- Satisfied: 48.6%
- Very satisfied: 35.3%

Would you recommend being a peer leader to other students? (n=397)

- Yes, absolutely, 85.6%
- Yes, for most , 10.6%
- Yes, for some (but not most), 2.3%
- No, 0.3%
- I don't know, 1.3%

Parting Thought

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

-George Kuh, 2010

Questions and Answers

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