



NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Peer Leadership in Higher Education: A National Portrait

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A Look to the Literature: Peers

Peers play a large role in college student success & can positively affect:

- Students' transition to college (*Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002; Crissman Ishler, 2002; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Paul & Brier, 2001; Schlossberg, 1981*)
- Social and emotional development (*Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Guon, 1988; Harmon, 2006*)
- Leadership & career skills development (*Astin, 1993; Astin & Kent, Gardner, 2010; 1983; Pascarella, Ethington, & Smart, 1988; Schuh & Laverty, 1983*)

A Look to the Literature: Peers

Peers play a large role in college student success & can positively affect:

- Satisfaction with college (*Astin, 1993; Coffman & Gilligan, 2002*)
- Learning & academic performance (*Astin, 1993; Donahue, 2004; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996*)
- Persistence & retention (*Bean, 1985; Braxton, 2002; Potts, Schultz & Foust, 2003-4; Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1993*)

“The student’s peer group is the **single most potent source of influence** on growth and development during the undergraduate years” *(Astin, 1993, p. 398)*

“**Students’ interactions with their peers also have a strong influence on many aspects of change during college**, *[including]* intellectual development and orientation; political, social, and religious values, academic and social self-concept; intellectual orientation; interpersonal skills; moral development; general maturity and personal development”

(Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, pp. 620-621)

Peer Leadership: A Definition

“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, 2010)

Literature on Peer Leadership

- Ender & Kay (2001) meta-analysis on peer leadership
 - First emerged in residential life and orientation & remain most prominent in these settings
 - Growing range of uses
 - Least utilized but growing area: Academics
- Peer leaders are empowered to exert influence in a less intimidating way than staff or faculty (Cuseo, 1991; Hart, 1995)
- Peers are an efficient and effective resource

Nerd Alert!



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Data Source

- Peer Leadership Survey sponsored by Center
- Administered in Spring 2009 to 3,733 institutional reps asking them to forward to student peer leaders
- Online survey containing items on:
 - Student demographics
 - Experiences with peer leadership
 - Characteristics of peer leader roles & programs
 - Self-rated change related to PL experience
 - Open-ended items
- 1,972 survey respondents

Sample

- Skewed toward:
 - Female students (74% of respondents were women)
 - High academic performers (80% reported GPA \geq 3.0)
 - Students engaged in peer leadership
- Adequate representation by:
 - Race/ethnicity
 - Class standing
 - In-state vs. out-of-state students
 - Residential vs. commuter students
- Not nationally representative but comprehensive

General Results

- 89.5% of respondents reported being peer leaders
- 43.6% report holding more than one peer leader position “currently”
- 7.9% hold four or more peer leader positions “currently”
- Most have held several peer leader positions throughout college (mean = 2.67)
- 97.8% would recommend being a peer leader to other students

Most Common Sponsors of PLE

Campus-Based Organization	Percent
Academic*	58.6
Orientation	31.6
Residence Halls	29.6
Community Service	25.2
Other**	14.8
Student Government	11.6

Most Common Sponsors of PLE

Campus-Based Organization	Percent
Academic*	<u>Titles for Academic Peer Leader Roles:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• FY seminar peer leader• Tutor• Academic mentor• Peer advisor• Teaching assistant
Orientation	
Residence Halls	
Community Service	
Other**	
Student Government	

Most Common Sponsors of PLE

Campus-Based Organization	Percent
Academic*	<u>Other Sponsors of Peer Leadership Experiences:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• First-year experience• Greek life• Leadership programs• Admissions• Student media
Orientation	
Residence Halls	
Community Service	
Other**	
Student Government	

Most Common Sponsors of PLE

**Orientation PL (n = 553)
also participate in PL with...**

- Academics (53.5%)
- Community Service (32.4%)
- Residence Halls (27.7%)
- Student Government (15.6%)
- Athletics (11.8%)
- Counseling/Mental Health (10.1%)

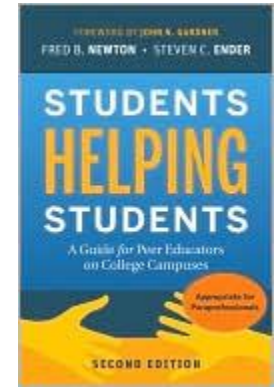
**12.1% have 4+
PL roles
“currently”**

**Mean =
3.11 total
PL roles**

Less Common Sponsors of PLE

Campus-Based Organization	Percent
Athletics	8.6
Religious Organizations	8.2
Multicultural Organizations	7.4
Counseling or Mental Health	7.0
Student Productions	4.6
Physical Health	3.4
Judicial	3.0
Study Abroad	2.5

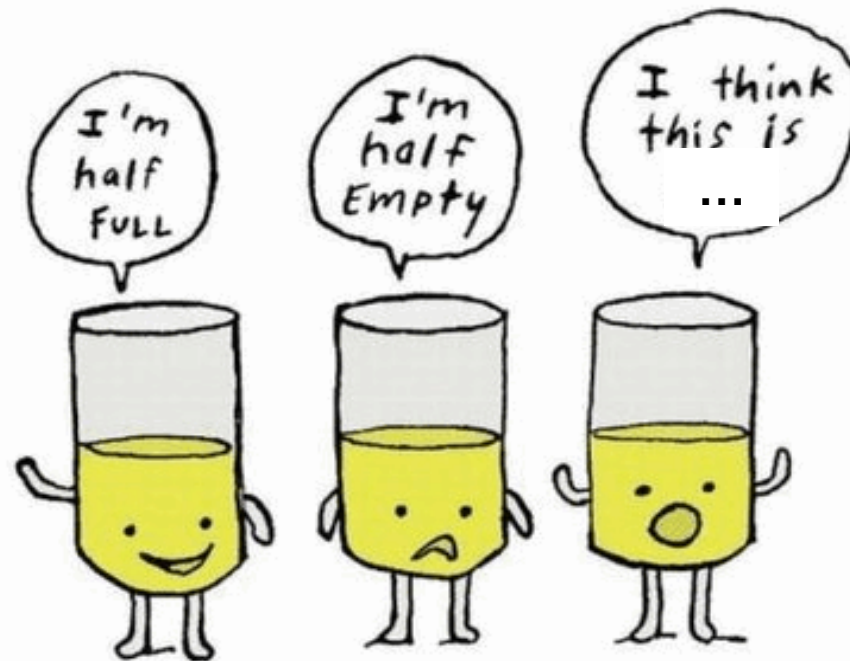
Peer Leader Training



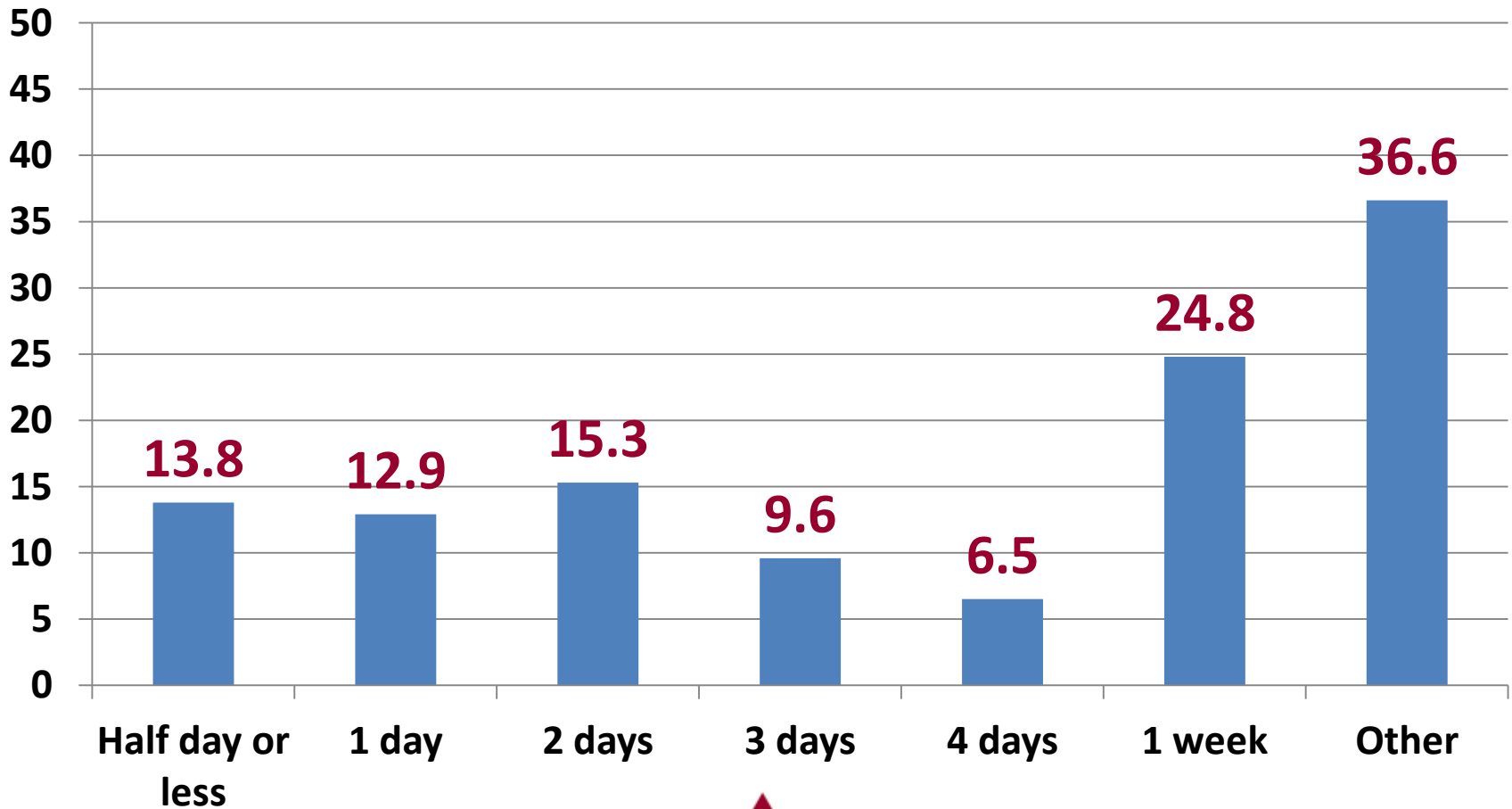
“Students who have been selected **AND TRAINED** to offer educational services to their peers.”



83.6 % of respondents reported receiving training for their PL role



Peer Leader Training



Trends in Peer Leader Training

- Longer training modules
- Ongoing support & professional development
- Curricular components
- Outcomes focused
- Focus on supervision as part of training
- Peer leadership & training among peer leaders
- Integrated across campus and across PLE

Peer Leader Rewards

Form of Compensation	Percent
Financial compensation	65.1
Volunteer (no compensation)	50.5
Course credit	21.9
Other (Housing)	5.8

Intrinsic Motivation

- Students found PLE to be intrinsically motivating
- Common adjectives to describe PLE were “fulfilling” and “rewarding”
- Intrinsic motivators for being a peer leader were described much more often than extrinsic motivators, such as earning money or course credit

Intrinsic Motivators

“Being a leader gives you the chance to serve as a positive role model for others, and hopefully inspire them to want to become successful too! There is no more rewarding feeling than to know that you were the one who helped make things possible.”

“It can be frustrating when you’re trying to help people who don’t even want to listen to you, but it’s a good feeling when the messages get across to some people and make a difference in their lives.”

Self-Rated Change in Skills

Skill	% Reporting “Stronger” or “Much Stronger”
Interpersonal communication	93.8
Organization	80.7
Time management	79.5
Presentation	79.2
Written communication	60.7
Academic	51.2

Self-Rated Change in Skills

“Peer leadership increases your communication skills dramatically... I just feel strongly about peer leadership because it boosts your confidence.”

“The responsibilities of peer leadership helped me to learn more about organization, time management, as well as teamwork, and cooperation.”



Self-Rated Impact on Undergraduate Experience

Experience	% “Increased”
Knowledge of campus resources	91.1
Meaningful interaction with peers	89.1
Meaningful interaction with staff	85.6
Meaningful interaction with faculty	82.8
Feeling of belonging at institution	80.7
Understanding of diverse people	78.5
Interaction with diverse people	78.1
Desire to persist at institution	70.7

Self-Rated Impact on Undergraduate Experience

“When I first got the job I was shy and unsure of myself a lot of the times but over the past almost two years I have grown and become more confident. I have learned to communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds. I have also had the opportunity to become close to faculty and staff that I work with. I feel more connected to campus and have enjoyed being there for freshmen students that are struggling with the college transition.”

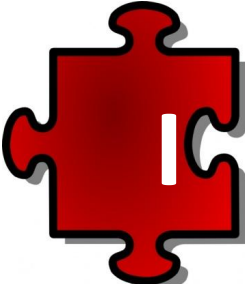


Thoughts and Opportunities

- Prominent and emergent areas of peer leadership
 - Ongoing leadership from field of orientation
 - Peer leadership in academics and community service are growing areas
- Challenge of over-involved peer leaders
- Movement to longer & ongoing training modules
- Opportunities to highlight the intrinsic rewards of PL
- Peer leaders perceive that it has positive outcomes
 - Academics outcomes

Peer Leadership as a...

 **H I G H**

 **I M P A C T**

 **P R A C T I C E**

Definition of High-Impact Practices

“Teaching and learning practices that have been widely tested and have been **shown to be beneficial for college students** from many backgrounds. These practices take many different forms, depending upon learner characteristics and on institutional priorities and contexts. [*HIPs are*] **practices that educational research suggest increase rates of retention and student engagement.**”

(Kuh, 2010)



10 High-Impact Practices

- ✓ First-Year Seminars and Experiences
- ✓ Common Intellectual Experiences
- ✓ Learning Communities
- ✓ Writing-Intensive Courses
- ✓ Collaborative Assignments & Projects
- ✓ Undergraduate Research
- ✓ Diversity/Global Learning
- ✓ Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
- ✓ Internships
- ✓ Capstone Courses and Projects



Characteristics of High-Impact Practices

- Creates an investment of time and energy
- Includes interaction with faculty and peers about substantive matters
- High expectations
- Includes frequent feedback
- Exposure to diverse perspectives
- Demands reflection and integrated learning
- Discovering relevance through real-world application
- Accountability



Highly Transferable

“It stands to reason that these key conditions **can be adapted and incorporated into any teaching and learning situation inside or outside the classroom** to promote higher levels of student performance.”

(Kuh in Brownell & Swaner, 2010, p. xi)

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- Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
- Capstone Courses & Projects
- Peer Leadership**

Questions & Comments

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