The Trusted Expert and Internationally Recognized Leader for all Postsecondary Student Transitions
Academic Peer Leaders: Resurgent 20th Century Activity Leads to Gains in 21st Century Outcomes

Jennifer R. Keup

2017 AAC&U Annual Meeting
San Francisco, CA

@jrkeup
@NRCFYEST
Session Learning Objectives

As a result of attending this session, participants will:

• ...gain a greater understanding of the characteristics of PL programs and their relationship with 21\textsuperscript{st} Century learning outcomes.

• ...advance their understanding of PL as an emerging practice in colleges, departments, and academic support programs.

• ...have the opportunity to compare their peer leader program to a national profile and to consider innovations and refinements to their program.
Introduction

BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Support Networks in the First Year

Interacted “daily” with:

- Close friends at this institution: 75
- Family: 36
- Close friends not at this institution: 33
- Siblings or extended family: 24
- Faculty & staff: 15
- GAs/Tas: 3
- Academic advisors: 1

*2016 YFYC Survey
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, p. 398)
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)
Defining Peer Educators

“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.”

(Newton & Ender, 2010, p. 6)
Background on Peer Leaders

• Historically, Peer Leaders were situated in cocurricular units (orientation, residence life)

• Recently, the use of Peer Leaders in the classroom and academic realm has become more widespread
  – Roles: tutors, Supplemental Instruction leaders, and peer advisors
  – Courses: English composition, introductory mathematics, gateway courses, and first-year seminars

• The lines between curricular and cocurricular spaces are being intentionally blurred
Background on Peer Leaders

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

• 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
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 about 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. The 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 NRChrouch@iupui.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.

Methods

2013 NATIONAL SURVEY OF PEER LEADERS
Method: Data Source

2013 National Survey of Peer Leaders

• 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 Participating Institutions:
2013 National Survey of Peer Leaders

Angelo State University
Appalachian State University
Bethany College
Brigham Young University
Campbell University
Cedar Crest College
Colorado State University
East Carolina University
Eastern Illinois University
Fort Hays State University
Framingham State University
Furman University
Georgia Southern University
Hofstra University
Indiana University - Purdue University Fort Wayne
Indiana University East
Kennesaw State University
Lesley University
Lyndon State College
Madonna University
Minot State University
Missouri State University
Montclair State University
Morgan State University
Northern Illinois University
Ohio University
Oklahoma State University - Main Campus
Oregon State University
San Jose State University
South Dakota State University
Southern Arkansas University
Southern Illinois University
Stetson University
Temple University
The College at Brockport
The University of Maryland - College Park
The University of New Orleans
The University of South Florida
The University of Tampa
University of Central Florida
University of Florida
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
University of Maryland Baltimore County
University of South Carolina Columbia
University of South Carolina Upstate
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Wayne State University
Wells College
Wittenberg University
Method: Data Source

2013 National Survey of Peer Leaders

- Student survey administered from 3/26/2013-6/1/2013
- 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
Findings

TYPE & SPONSORSHIP 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Leader Experience (“mark all that apply”)</th>
<th>%</th>
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<td>Academic - peer advisor</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community service or service learning</td>
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<td>Academic - Tutor</td>
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### 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)**

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic-Supplemental Instruction leader</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural affairs</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study abroad</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor or recreational sports</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling or mental health</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student productions or media</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial affairs or student conduct</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International student office</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial literacy</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
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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: 77 (86.4%)

Election: 30 (38.8%)

Nomination: 28 (35.9%)

Other: 1 (2.8%)
Training

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

- **Yes**: 85.6%
- **No**: 13.5%
- **I don't know**: 0.8%
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
Compensation

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Compensation</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Compensation</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room and board</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course credit</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Development</th>
<th>% Increased</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal communication</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>77.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>71.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>67.5</td>
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<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>65.8</td>
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<td>Written communication</td>
<td>53.4</td>
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</table>
“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.”
### Outcomes of PLEs

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<th>Undergraduate Experience</th>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of campus resources</td>
<td>83.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful interaction with peers</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of belonging at institution</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful interaction with staff members</td>
<td>75.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction with people from different backgrounds</td>
<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful interaction with faculty</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding people from different backgrounds</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to engage in continuous learning</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
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<td>Desire to persist at institution</td>
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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.”
## Outcomes of PLEs

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

“Tutoring in the writing center made me more interested in pursuing a career related to assisting students with writing, especially ESL students.”

“Because of my leadership experience, I finally figured out what I want to do with my life after I graduate. I am much more motivated now than I was when I was a freshman to complete my courses with decent grades. I am very motivated to learn the content of my courses as opposed to just getting a grade.”
# Outcomes of PLEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Performance</th>
<th>% Increased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic skill development</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall academic performance</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade point average</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of credit hours completed each term</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate timely graduation</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-Rated Change in Academics

“As a Biology major, tutoring in chemistry and biology courses keeps the information fresh in my head. As I take higher level courses that requires me to remember basic concepts, I already know them thoroughly and I am able to grasp new concepts better.”

“Commitments with my peer leader positions have interfered with the amount of free time that I have to study for exams, complete assignments, and become further involved with my coursework.”
Satisfaction with PLEs

How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your peer leadership experiences?

- Very dissatisfied: 1.5%
- Dissatisfied: 4.9%
- Slightly dissatisfied: 9.1%
- Neutral: 19.4%
- Slightly satisfied: 4.9%
- Satisfied: 39.5%
- Very satisfied: 50.9%

Would you recommend being a peer leader to other students?

- Yes, absolutely: 80.4%
- Yes, for most of the peer leadership positions I have held: 14.9%
- Yes, for some of the peer leadership positions I have held (but not most): 3.0%
- No: 0.4%

www.sc.edu/fye
Conclusions

**PEER LEADERSHIP AS A HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE**

High-Impact Educational Practices

**First-Year Seminars and Experiences**
Many schools are now building high-impact first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together for a year-long experience. These experiences help students develop their intellectual and practical capacities, to think critically, to engage in complex and difficult problems, and to develop the skills necessary to succeed in college.

**Common Intellectual Experiences**
The idea of "core courses" has evolved into a variety of different forms, such as a set of required core courses or a vertically integrated general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and the required participation in a learning community (see blog). These programs allow for a mix of broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and ancillary options for students.

**Learning Communities**
The key feature of learning communities is for students to engage in a variety of learning across contexts and to interact with students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses, in a variety of settings and with one another and with their peers. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some additional, FAQ "linked arms" and "professional courses," other future service learning.

**Writing-Intensive Courses**
These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including first-year courses. Students are encouraged to produce and revolve various forms of writing for different audiences and different disciplines. The effectiveness of this program practice "across the curriculum" has been brought together in an effort to improve literacy in the humanities, history, and more.

**Collaborative Assignments and Projects**
Collaborative learning involves a key goal of learning to work, and solve problems in the company of others, and relearning one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences."}

**Undergraduate Research**
Many colleges and universities are now providing research opportunities for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been more prominent in the sciences, with less emphasis on the arts and humanities. Many programs offer students opportunities to conduct research and explore their interests, and then to engage in a variety of ways with the results of their work.

**Diversity/Global Learning**
Many colleges and universities now have courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These courses—which vary widely—are designed to address issues such as global conflict, conflict, and poverty. Frequently, intercultural studies are offered by experiential learning in the community and/or in-service programs.

**Service Learning, Community-Based Learning**
In these programs, field-based "experiential learning" with community partners is an institutional strategy—and often a required part of the core. The idea is to provide students with direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity for students to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and offer in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that going something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

**Internships**
Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience to work settings—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the opportunity to engage in applied professional work. In such projects, students complete a project or project that is approved by a faculty member.

**Capstone Courses and Projects**
When they're called "capstone courses," or in other cases, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college career to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," or an equivalent of work. Capstone courses are often offered in both academic programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.

**Peer Leadership as a High-Impact Practice**
Many schools have now built into their curricula first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together for a year-long experience. These experiences help students develop their intellectual and practical capacities, to think critically, to engage in complex and difficult problems, and to develop the skills necessary to succeed in college.
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)
Characteristics of HIPs

• Creates an investment of time and energy
• Includes interaction with faculty and peers about substantive matters
• Real-world applications
• High expectations
• Includes frequent feedback
• Exposure to diverse perspectives
• Demands reflection and integrated learning
• Accountability
Consider Adaptability of HIPs

“[HIP] 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. There are doubtless other high-impact activities...in which large number of students participate.”

Kuh in Brownell & Swaner, 2010
High-Impact Practices

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

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

Thought is action in rehearsal.
Sigmund Freud
Takeaways - Overall

- Peer leaders report engagement in experiences
  - 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 (95%) would recommend at least some peer leadership positions to other students

- Insight into common and potential selection, training, and compensation models
Takeaways - Overall

• 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
• Peer leadership as an emergent HIP
• How do PL practices reflect and affect equity issues
keupj@mailbox.sc.edu
How long was the initial formal training for your current and/or previous peer leader position(s)? (n = 3,353)
Training

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

- Yes: 68.8%
- No: 28.8%
- I don't know: 2.4%

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

- Retreat: 38.5%
- Staff meetings: 61.2%
- Meetings with supervisor: 47.8%
- Other: 7.1%

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