Optimizing Success: Encouraging Collaborative Investment in Peer Tutors

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Abstract

Student success and retention are institutional priorities at SUNY Geneseo. We share how we embraced a shared-leadership approach to collaboration to develop a hybrid tutor training curriculum. A pilot training course administered during the Fall of 2019 included over 100 undergraduate tutors working in four previously separate centers. The course encourages a growth mindset approach to learning, contextualized by cultural competency and inclusive pedagogy. Our original framing of tutoring as valued, high-impact experiential learning is paired with the tutors’ self-reflections on their practice, with the wider benefit of destigmatizing the use of academic support services. We share the course design and the preliminary results, highlighting the perspectives of our tutors, and suggest strategies for harnessing institutional energies around equity and cultural change.

College Context

SUNY Geneseo is a public four year comprehensive liberal arts college with approximately 5,500 undergraduates and 100 graduate students. The college has 50 major programs, focusing on the liberal arts and sciences, business, and education. Just about 20% of students come from underrepresented groups. Geneseo has 50 undergraduate programs, focusing on the liberal arts and sciences, and 100 graduate students. The college has 50 major programs, focusing on the liberal arts and sciences, and 100 graduate students. The college has 50 major programs, focusing on the liberal arts and sciences, and 100 graduate students.

Program format

Program development on campus occurs in silos, with faculty leaders often not given the tools or incentive to collaborate and connect to programs with similar missions.

Approaches:
- Engage faculty already committed to integrative learning and high-impact practices.
- Build collaboration among major tutoring initiatives represented in this team to model institutional change.
- This project is part of a wider strategic attempt to focus campus innovation that directly connects student success initiatives to the institution’s commitment to high impact learning.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:
- understand that a high quality tutoring experience is not solely a matter of their content competence, but rather what we define as a high impact experience.
- embrace a focus on the learning process as a growth mindset model which empowers students (transferability of skills,...) versus a transmission model in which a specific body of knowledge is transmitted from the teacher to the student.
- be prepared to apply their knowledge and skills to the fluid dynamics of a tutoring scenario which could involve any combination of approaches to learning and recognition of the whole student in front of them and what that student brings to the interaction.
- recognize the diversity of backgrounds and learning experiences of their tutees and how those differences can influence their learning experience.
- be better prepared to connect tutoring experience to personal/professional goals.
- reflect in writing on the significance of their roles as well as the content of the training course.

Fall 2019
In-person Welcome event for Pilot course (sq tutors, first-time and continuing) and 5-week training course (online)
Direct Measure of Tutor growth through final reflective paper.
Indirect measurement of tutor growth via anonymous survey
Present at AAC&U Diversity, Equity, and Student Success Conference

Spring 2020
Second training program in progress for first-time tutors (sq tutors)
Analysis of Fall 2019 data
Indirect measurement of tutor growth via anonymous survey
Public training material or students that were vocal about their opinions about the course as a whole.
Negative responses came mostly from experienced tutors in a total of 20 surveys at the end of the training material or students that were vocal about their opinions about the course as a whole.

Faculty perceptions (direct assessment)

- I feel that the topics covered in the tutor training program were appropriate.
- I valued the opportunity to share my experiences with a group of tutors in online discussions.
- I believe the training program has helped me to become a more effective tutor.

Student perceptions (indirect assessment)

- The module content was new to me.
- I found the material in the module to be practical and useful.
- The group discussion helped me think about my teaching practice differently.

Next steps?
- Evaluate the program’s effect on under-represented student populations (both tutors and students)
- Publish training materials as an open educational resource (OER)
- Increase the number of tutoring programs participating in training
- Develop effective collaborative practices
- Revise training program content and delivery of training for 2020-2021

Training Program References


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