

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING THE EXPERIENCE OF LEADING

MORE THAN JUST A REVIEW SESSION

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We have been involved in the PLTL project for Anatomy & Physiology (A&P) for two semesters at Middlesex County College (NJ), under the direction of our professor, Barbara Bogner. In spite of this relatively short time, we have been able to generate enormous interest. Certainly our goal was to improve grades in a subject which seemed to be losing favor among students but on the road to realizing this goal, we have created a successful new learning medium. The PLTL model has broken barriers, helped to create friendships and most significantly by building the confidence of every student involved.

As a learning vehicle, the PLTL model has been a welcome addition to our science curriculum. Recognizing some of the drawbacks of the typical lecture-style learning, the PLTL model strives to make the students active learners rather than passive note-takers. Following this paradigm, the PLTL workshops have afforded us a unique opportunity to impact fellow students' perception of the course and more importantly themselves. Encouraging the students to take responsibility for their own learning rather than being spoon-fed facts is one of the many significant benefits of the peer-led workshops. In addition to simply reviewing answers, as a group we search for different explanations. We work together to answer key questions such as "What is the significance of this topic?" and "How does this new material relate to what we already know?" In this fashion, everyone is heard and each opinion matters. I have found this type of learning fosters confidence in the subject matter.

The added benefits of the Peer Led Team Learning model are far reaching and simply amazing. Prior to my discoveries in peer workshops, I would have never considered myself a candidate to lead other students in *any* capacity. I have learned however, with the help of my fellow students and the PLTL experience, the inspiration to achieve great things can come on the heels of even the smallest successes. There is a thrill in helping a fellow student understand a concept, motivating them to do far better on a quiz or exam, or merely giving the *nudge* to find an answer on their own. In these instances I have discovered what teachers find so rewarding, empowering fellow students. It's a great feeling! In some cases, these little victories are all a student needs to find the courage and confidence to continue their study of a difficult subject or major. Hearing, "*Now I get it*", for the first time from a student is all the evidence needed to highlight the workshops' positive influence and ultimate success.

While nearly a year has passed since I decided to apply for the peer leader position, I have become a more mature, responsible student in the process. In retrospect, my only regret is that Middlesex had not instituted the program sooner. Having been recommended by my professor, I was excited to be involved in this new experimental program although unsure what it might entail. On the surface, the peer leader position seemed like a great opportunity to review my A&P knowledge. I have realized that this project involves much more than my reviewing old A&P notes. As a student who has struggled in the past, I feel uniquely equipped and

obligated to share my successes and failures with fellow students. Helping others to learn has inspired me to pursue goals I had not thought attainable.

I know others will benefit as much as I have from being involved in this fantastic project as a peer leader. David Gosser, the PLTL project director suggests, "...being a workshop leader is a direct civic engagement with the life of the college..." Over merely two semesters, the PLTL model has allowed us all to learn and grow as active students and "engaging" members of our college.

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