

# PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION

## PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING AT MOREHOUSE COLLEGE: IMPETUS FOR A CONFERENCE

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### Morehouse College

Founded in 1867, Morehouse College is an all male, predominately African American, liberal arts institution in Atlanta, Georgia. Morehouse offers the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees in 26 majors in three academic divisions: The Division of Science and Mathematics, the Division of Business Administration and Economics and the Division of Humanities and Social Science. With an enrollment of approximately 2600, the student body represents more than 40 states and 27 countries. The mission of Morehouse College is to provide a comprehensive academic, social and spiritual experience that prepares its students for leadership and success in the larger society.

Morehouse College has a rich history of producing outstanding African American leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Julian Bond, Maynard H. Jackson, Shelton “Spike” Lee, James M. Nabrit and Howard Thurman. Morehouse College has produced three Rhodes Scholars: Nima A. Warfield (1994), Christopher Edlers (2001) and Oluwabusayo “Tope” Folarin (2003). Also in 2003, The *Wall Street Journal* named Morehouse one of the top 50 most successful schools across the nation when it comes to sending students to well-known, well-respected graduate and professional schools. In 2004, Black *Enterprise magazine* ranked Morehouse the No. 1 college in the nation for educating African American students for the third consecutive time.

The Morehouse College Division of Science and Mathematics embraces four core values: Research engagement of faculty and students, active learning, interdisciplinary education and international exposure. The Division houses a dual-degree engineering program with the Georgia Institute of Technology and other institutions; has launched the Center for Excellence in science, Engineering and Mathematics with a large U.S. Department of Defense grant; and provides significant research training opportunities through a number of federally and privately funded training programs, including the NSF HBCU-UP Program, NIH MBRS RISE Program, Howard Hughes Program and DoD John Hopps Scholars Program. The Division also houses a number of special programs and minors including Public Health, Bioinformatics and Neuroscience.

PLTL at Morehouse College is an outgrowth of the Division of Science and Mathematics faculty’s strong commitment to student success. This effort is one part of a strategic plan that has as a primary focus increasing the success of students in the sciences and advancing the best practices for in science education.

### Peer Led Team Learning at Morehouse College

Peer Led Team Learning (PLTL) originated as a learning enhancement in Chemistry courses and the implementation of PLTL at Morehouse College, not surprisingly, began in Chemistry. The Department of Chemistry began using PLTL in the Fall 2004 and implementation in other science disciplines began

in the Fall 2005. The goals of PLTL in our Division of Science and Mathematics are to: 1) Increase performance in gatekeeper courses, and 2) increase retention in the sciences by improving student success. In addition to Chemistry, courses in Biology, Mathematics, Psychology, and Physics have implemented PLTL programs in the past five years and we plan to expand PLTL to Computer Science and to additional courses in the sciences and mathematics.

PLTL at Morehouse College has grown through the efforts of faculty and administrators, but relies on significant faculty leadership and investment to collaboratively build infrastructure, develop policies, identify and provide training opportunities for both faculty and students, and implement a coordinated program of intervention with a shared evaluation strategy. Several faculty members have written small grants to support PLTL implementation at the College. Faculty members have also made presentations on the intervention and early research findings.

More than 20 Morehouse faculty and staff have learned about PLTL at Chautauqua Conferences and conferences hosted by the PLTL Program at CCNY. Our program includes more than 50 peer leaders each semester and provides both students and faculty PLTL training throughout the academic year. We recently established super leaders who serve as apprentices to faculty and provide ongoing supervision of peer leaders involved in our program. An annual Peer Leader Recognition Luncheon was established last year for peer leaders in all disciplines to celebrate the important contributions our peer leaders make to science education at the College. Critical assessment of PLTL efforts at Morehouse has been assisted by Leo Gafney, Ph.D. and more recently by Willie Pearson, Ph.D. Currently, PLTL at Morehouse College is supported by a grant from the Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA).

#### The Conference

On November 13-14, 2009 Morehouse College sponsored the national conference, *Expanding Peer Led Team Learning (PLTL) in the Sciences and Mathematics: Strategies for Successful Implementation*. Morehouse faculty envisioned this conference as a mechanism to teach strategies and best practices associated with the successful implementation of PLTL in diverse educational institutions. As an institution implementing PLTL across the science disciplines since 2005, Morehouse faculty sought to create a forum for faculty and administrators from across the country to share ideas, learn new strategies and contemplate the future of PLTL in higher education and beyond. We sought to provide basic and advanced faculty training in PLTL methodology for faculty members in all science disciplines, as well as expose faculty and administrators to best practices in program evaluation and management.

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