

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION

STUDENTS SPREADING PLTL AT COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

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Peer leaders at Coastal Carolina University (Conway, South Carolina) are required to take a semester-long training course, either before or during their first semester of leading workshops. The class is structured much like PLTL training classes at other colleges. Topics covered in the course include the dynamics of the Workshop idea, the groundwork for leading a workshop, along with discussing the good and bad things to expect while in workshop. Leaders are required to keep a running journal of what happens in the workshops each week. The coordinators and the instructor collect the journals every Friday, read and comment on them, often giving advice on how to handle particular situations that arise in the workshop that week.

We, the leaders, were also required to come up with a semester-long project on how to enhance workshops. This project could be on any topic, as long as it pertained to Workshops or promoted the Workshop idea. Many members of the class chose to start up workshops in other disciplines at Coastal. One peer leader even put forth the idea of starting Workshop Chemistry in a local high school but this was set aside until the teachers became more familiar with the idea.

We began by surveying the students in the potential classes to see if they were interested and would benefit from a Workshop. Out of the 210 students surveyed, 63% said they wanted workshops, and 67% felt they would benefit from the workshop. Many of the students had already experienced the Workshop atmosphere through general chemistry and felt they had benefited from it. The next step was to convince the professors that this was a good idea. It was tough to convince those who had not heard of Workshop Chemistry before, but when presented with the data from the student survey, they slowly began to take note of this new technique and how it enhanced the students' learning ability. From conception to running trial workshops in Organic Chemistry and Marine Science took approximately a year. The Physics and Calculus departments were also interested and are trying other initiatives.

Physics is involved with the SCALE-UP program from North Carolina State University, and Calculus has its Math-lab program, which consists of several students working throughout the day helping those with math difficulties. The problem setting up workshops was finding classrooms and students qualified enough to be workshop leaders. Workshop leaders are chosen at Coastal from the best of the best. The workshop leaders for that discipline then sat down and started working on the materials. We chose the material that we felt gave the students the most difficulty, with many examples to drive the points home. Since this was a new phenomenon, it was also tough to get workshop materials and get the faculty to play along with this new "toy."

Peer-led team learning at Coastal is starting to become very popular. The students are receptive, especially those with previous workshop experience. Workshops in Organic Chemistry and Marine Science have started and are running full speed, while the Physics and Calculus departments are taking steps to get started. Although some of the Coastal Carolina faculty have been slow to adopt the idea due to lack of knowledge about the program, they are slowly “seeing the light.” The peer leaders could conduct mock workshops with faculty as students, to help them understand the importance of the Workshop program. And as far as the high school scene, if the teachers get more experience on how the workshop runs, they might be more open to the idea the next time. The peer leaders could conduct some mock workshops in different high schools and invite teachers from the surrounding high schools to participate. For now, all the peer leaders and instructor can do is give faculty first-hand experience on how their workshops are doing and possibly spark some more new interest.

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