

# PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING SUSTAINABILITY

## EXTENDING THE PLTL WORKSHOP LEADERS' ROLE

DANIEL BRENES, JENNIFER BUSTOS, JUAN GALLEGOS, AND MAI NGUYEN

### Workshops in College Algebra class

“In the college algebra class, some students feel afraid and think mathematics is so hard to learn. However, in the workshops, working with students allowed me to understand where and what the problems are, and the students were able to get help from the workshops leaders. In the group, I like to use an easy example to describe where the point of difficulty is. They will also tell me their thinking or different answers about the questions. In my mind, PLTL is a student team group. Besides learning the skill of leadership, I can also learn different knowledge or thinking from the students. It is a really great team group in which the students can help each other.” *Po-Hsien*

“My experiences in PLTL have strengthened my idea that mathematics tutors are very useful at UHD. It seems that many students entering Ms. Nakamura class are either intimidated or simply hate math. I think in this class they are given the opportunity to change their views on math, since they are given a variety of options to seek help, from tutoring at the lab to having their own workshop leader in class. Although I have only done PLTL once before, I know that the students I worked with were left with a totally different attitude towards math. All it takes is a little more dedication and time to the student, which is what PLTL essentially provides.” *Juan Gallegos*

“To be a workshop leader in the college algebra class has been a benefit to me. By working with students, I actually developed some leadership skills. Also, students have a chance to learn algebra the easier way. They have better assistance than any other classes since they do not need to wait to see an instructor. They can always find help with workshop leaders. Furthermore, students could also learn about leadership through the workshop. By participating with the group learning, they could find out that they might be the next workshop leader and it will be a wonderful experience for them.” *Charles Chiu*

“My experience in the PLTL college algebra class as a student gave me the confidence in mathematics that I was lacking. Most students who do not like mathematics are actually afraid of the numbers and letters because they make no sense to them. This is the way I felt. However, in PLTL, the approach to teaching college algebra is not like traditional classes. I really liked how Ms Nakamura made "real life sense" out of college algebra. The workshops in college algebra really allowed me the time I needed to focus on reinforcing the material that was recently covered by the professor. In case I had a question from the lecture or I came up with a new one while working out the workshop material, my PLTL workshop leader was there to help me out. Even the classmates in my group who understood could help me understand what was going on. When you are sitting in a group in class facing each other, you really have no choice but to do your work and listen to all of the questions being answered by the workshop leader.” *Patricia Ramon*

### Workshops in the PLTL Lab-S738

- The PLTL Lab is a vital part of the learning experience.
- The lab provides a comfortable working environment for the students who normally are too shy to ask questions.
- As a tutor we must ensure clarity, patience, and compassion for the students.
- In the lab, the students that are struggling receive the support and guidance that are essential for their success.
- The lab helps students catch up in material that they might have missed or don't understand.
- The students are able to receive immediate one on one attention in areas that remain unclear outside of the classroom.
- The environment of the PLTL lab sets a tone of relaxation and comfort for the students, as opposed to a classroom environment where some students are terrified.
- Thus, the students are more comfortable asking the tutors for help as opposed to their professor.
- Simply seeing other students asking for help, they are more inclined to ask questions themselves.
- Just sitting next to the student while he or she is working a problem gives the student the confidence they need to answer the problem correctly.
- At times, a student may seek guidance from various tutors in one session.
- The PLTL lab allows the students to interact and learn in such a way that is not experienced in the classroom.
- The workshops in the lab are very helpful for the students who need extra time out of class.

### Workshops in the START Program

The skills of a PLTL workshop leader can be extended into other roles, such as the START Program. Trained as a workshop leader, I utilized the skills that were necessary to conduct group dynamics in a new setting.

Extending the role of workshop leader to the START program is a good idea, since all the tutors are positive role models. They all have different experiences, come from different majors, and would be able to provide the incoming students with a diverse view of the college experience.

As a workshop leader it was interesting to see how the workshop environment would function in a college preparation program like the START program. I think that the use of a workshop atmosphere was very successful and that it helped the students interact with each other and become friends. The START program showed that the role of a workshop leader does not have limitations and that they can be used in more than a classroom environment.

I think START program is a pretty good program for the freshmen students. Most of the students learned how to do and present their researches, how to work in the group, and what the difference between the high school and college. I wish our school had this program when I was a freshman. As a workshop leader in START program, I think the application of the workshop is unlimited.

As an experienced workshop leader, it was very easy to settle into the role of leading and guiding freshman students through the steps to start on the right foot in college. Since we've already had the experience of a few years in college, we can tell them about the mistakes we have made or avoided.

## Benefits of being a workshop leader

- “By working with various students, I have learned how to effectively communicate mathematics in a manner that is understandable and clear.” - *Daniel Brenes*
- “I learned how to guide a group which I feel will help me in society someday.” - *Po Hsien*
- “I am happy to know that I am more confident in mathematics in general. I have also realized that I really love to help people. I might consider teaching in the future. I really feel that my communication with groups of people has improved greatly.” - *Patricia Ramon*
- “PLTL improves your communication skills, you get some teaching experience, and it gives you the opportunity to travel.” - *Juan Gallegos*
- “Personally, the greatest benefit for me is the interaction with the students. My goal is to teach mathematics after graduation, so this experience is extremely helpful to me. I am learning how to connect with students and present information in a way that they can understand. My communication skills and confidence are also improving.” - *Tan Pham*
- “One benefit is that I can explain mathematical concepts better than I could before, and I got a refresher course on the technical terminology of mathematics.” - *Josh Keele*
- “I believe that working with the students on a one to one level makes me better at conversing with other people as well as developing my communication skills.” - *Daniel Valadez*
- “One of the benefits of being a PLTL workshop leader is getting the chance to help someone. It is a pleasing experience when you see someone overcome a problem because of your help.” - *Chris Harrison*
- “I have developed a way to guide students through the thinking process needed to solve every problem. In the future, this could be a great benefit for me to work with my coworker or even my employees if possible.” - *Charles Chiu*
- “I still remember when I was taking pre-calculus with Ms. Nakamura, I was very shy. I didn’t talk to anyone in class, after my classes, I just went straight home. Now by doing the workshop, I feel more confident when talking to people. I learned more about the leadership skill.” - *Mai Nguyen*

*Daniel Brenes, Jennifer Bustos, Juan Gallegos, and Mai Nguyen*  
Peer Leaders  
University of Houston-Downtown  
Houston, Texas

## Acknowledgments

Support for the Peer Leaders at the University of Houston-Downtown is provided by



*Editor's Note: This article is based on a poster presentation made at the 2004 PLTL National Conference, Chicago, IL.*

**Cite This Article as:** Brenes, D., Bustos, J., Gallegos, J., Nguyen, M. (2012). Extending the PLTL Workshop Leaders' Role. Peer-Led Team Learning: Leader Training. Online at <http://www.pltlis.org>. Originally published in *Progressions: The Peer-Led Team Learning Project Newsletter*, Volume 6, Number 4, Summer 2005.

Peer-Led Team Learning – Sustainability: Extending the PLTL Workshop Leaders' Role. Daniel Brenes, Jennifer Bustos, Juan Gallegos, and Mai Nguyen – 2012, [www.pltlis.org](http://www.pltlis.org)