

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING SUSTAINABILITY

WHEN THE MONEY DRIES UP: WHAT'S A DEAN TO DO? HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR DEAN HELP YOU

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As Dean of Arts and Sciences at a public university, I experience daily the consequences of declining public support for public education. In our state of Illinois, for example, public funding has been cut some 16% over the last three years, while the number of students we serve has increased from 10,000 to 12,000. We are all increasingly tuition dependent, but tuition pays just a fraction of the costs of an education. My colleagues at private institutions fare no better; for many, their primary source of income is from tuition; they spend hours of their time ensuring that they will successfully recruit the next crop of first year students on which their budgets depend, and hours more raising funds from outside sources. In short, the budget crisis is real, and we are constantly being asked to defer, to cut, and to prioritize.

The irony is that every dean was once a faculty member, with the same strong commitment to teaching, scholarship, and service that every academic has. In fact, in talking with my decanal colleagues, I have discovered that most deans decide to move into administration because they want to be able to have a helpful impact on the academic lives of faculty and students, and to make a mark on the institution. That said, sooner or later, the external funds for PLTL will dry up. The initial response of every dean is very predictable (with apologies to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross):

- Denial: “The money will never end! We’ll just apply for an extension.”
- Anger: “How do you expect me to pay for this?”
- Bargaining: “If I do this, will you....?”
- Acceptance: “Well, of course we have PLTL. Doesn’t everybody?”

The ultimate goal is institutionalization, that is, we want to bind Peer Led Team Learning so into the culture of the University that it becomes the norm, and its model of teaching is seen as business as usual. What does PLTL mean to a Dean?

From a Dean’s perspective, the value of PLTL is directly related to its success in meeting mission-related institutional goals. That is, after all, how our university is judged by accrediting bodies and legislators: Do we do what we say we are doing? The following will help you help me help you ensure the long term success of PLTL at our university.

How does PLTL express the mission of the University and the College?

For example, at NEIU, our mission is access and excellence. We provide a high quality education to the most diverse student body in the Midwest. So, you tell me about how PLTL uses cooperative learning as well as the more social and verbal learning styles that characterize many female and Peer-Led Team Learning – Sustainability: When the Money Dries Up: What’s a Dean to Do? Kate Forhan – 2012, www.pltlis.org

diverse learners. This means that we have more female and ethnic minority students who are successful in College level math and science and who become majors and later professionals in disciplines that are not usually seen as friendly to them.

Give me the data!

Too often assessment data goes to the NSF or some other outside agency and I never see it. But I am the one who needs to know, for example, that you have improved retention and graduation rates among students of color, and I am the one who will have to defend the program to University Budget Committees, Provosts, and even Trustees.

Show me a plan.

My budget may have been made up eight months ago, and you are telling me NOW that I need to provide \$5000 for student stipends? Talk to me a year before the funding ends. Show me where else there might be funds available. Is there money for tutors? Can you handle larger lectures with Peer Leaders in place? I need to be able to offset funds against each other, because it is very unlikely my budget will show an increase next year.

Show me academic transferability.

I am impressed by your success in your discipline. Can I get the same improvement in graduation and retention rates in Math? Biology? More women who are successful in Computer Science?

Can I call this faculty development?

I may have access to funds that are not part of my instructional budget. You know how this has rejuvenated your own teaching. Help me help others rediscover that same excitement.

Help me find "in kind" tradeoffs.

While the net cost may be the same, the funds may come from different areas, or (from my perspective, even better) from someone else's budget. Can we give students course credit instead of stipends? Tuition waivers? Dedicate a scholarship fund? How can I adjust faculty workloads appropriately?

Finally, one should never assume that a lack of cash support means that I do not support this (or any other) innovative teaching method. I am, after all, a teacher and scholar first. I believe in education and I care about students and faculty. But you have to help me see how I can do it. Bring me to acceptance.

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