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Peer Leaders' Training - Workshop Style
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Abstract

Typically workshop leaders are trained in a general classroom setting, one faculty member explaining the requirements and objectives of the workshop style to a classroom full of prospective leaders. The University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) has adapted the Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) training model to better suit the needs of both the students and the university by incorporating the workshop ideal into the training itself. UHD leaders experience first-hand the benefits of the workshop style and are given the chance to become familiar with the student's perspective before they begin running workshops themselves. The number of prospective leaders to be trained every semester has been reduced in accordance to the workshop style. Approximately 8 students undergo training per semester, with 11 sessions in total. The group meets for 1 hour each week under the guidance of a peer-coordinator to discuss topics from the *Handbook for Team Leaders* (Roth, Goldstein and Marcus, 2001). Peer-coordinators are previously trained leaders chosen due to their interest in education; their objective is to guide the leaders through their training in a manner that workshops should be conducted. Leaders are required to read through the section of the handbook to be discussed that week, reflect over, and then answer 3-6 questions as assignment so that they can be prepared to collaborate in the workshop. The materials used in the training workshops are created by the faculty supervisor, then given to the peer-coordinator to modify according to the group's particular needs. The coordinator offers all modifications up for approval to the supervisor as well as reviews after every workshop session is completed to ensure a constant flow of communication throughout the semester.

Modified PLTL model at UHD

The Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) Workshop is a pedagogical model used in classrooms that engage students in teams of six to eight in learning math and science guided by a peer leader. UHD has adapted the PLTL model to cater to the needs of the university and its students.

Figure 1. Original model

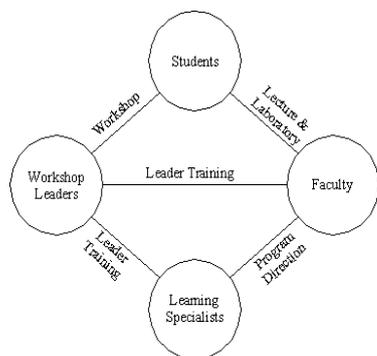
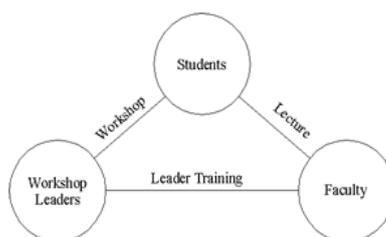


Figure 2. UHD model



In the absence of a Learning Specialist, UHD relies on open communication between leaders, peer coordinator and faculty to assure an optimal high impact learning experiences for students during workshops.

PLTL Workshops work in the classroom: Why not use them in peer leader training?

The PLTL model has been a huge success in helping students learn to collaborate with others and develop techniques that will help them become competent, and confident students. Another beneficial aspect to the model relates to the peer leaders that supervise the workshops. Peer leaders participate in the workshop for a multitude of reasons:

- Make lasting friends
- Learn to be a better leader
- Teaching experience
- Meeting leaders from other colleges and universities
- Preparation for future plans, becoming a math or science teacher

Since leaders have found such enrichment from the PLTL program, the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) has incorporated the PLTL workshop into the peer leader training.

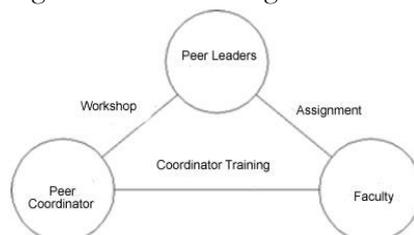
Workshop-Style Peer Leader Training

Training Model: Training is structured to imitate the workshop setting so that prospective leaders can have first-hand experience working with the various learning principles, styles, and strategies used in a collaborative setting.

Leaders are expected to participate in an eleven-week training period to become PLTL certified before they can lead workshops in their respective fields. The training model is identical to the UHD model for PLTL; our Peer Leaders take on the role of students, guided through the training sessions by a peer coordinator who report to the faculty advisor.

This intensive style of training provides opportunities for each leader to understand the interpersonal dynamics of a group along with the subject being discussed.

Figure 3. UHD training model



Faculty Advisor: Although the Faculty Advisor does not engage the students during the training workshops, she is an integral part of the learning process. It is the advisor's responsibility to select the prospective leaders for training and observe their growth throughout the semester.

All materials used in the workshop training, the weekly agendas, handouts and assignments are created by the advisor. Assignments are given to the leaders directly via email each week and constant communication is kept between the faculty advisor and the coordinator concerning materials, group dynamics, and the individual growth of each leader.

Peer Coordinator

The coordinator is essentially a role model for the leaders, setting the example for how a leader can indirectly guide their group and adjust situations in order to maintain a positive and welcoming atmosphere for everyone in the group. Each week the coordinator uses the assignment responses received from each group member to fine-tune the corresponding workshop materials. All revisions must be approved by the advisor before they are used in the workshop which allows the advisor and coordinator to discuss the progression of the training on a weekly basis. After each workshop session, the coordinator writes a review of the session, summarizing the details and interesting outcomes of the group's discussion as peer leaders write workshop leaders logs.

Peer Leaders

The requirements placed before the peer leaders during training are to read and answer the questions posed weekly by the advisor, attend the workshops, and simply participate. As with all PLTL workshops, you only get as much out of it as you put in, and it is up to the leaders to engage during the workshops since they are still in training and may be requested to leave the program or be denied certification if their actions are deemed undesirable in a peer leader.

Testimonials to the Success of Peer Leader Training Workshop Style

PLTL workshops not only help students learn the concepts taught in STEM disciplines, but also help peer leaders learn the theories and pedagogy of collaborative learning better, thus help them become more effective leaders.

“Through the PLTL workshop, I have become better in expressing my thought and knowledge.”
– Workshop Participant

“The PLTL workshop really is a place where peers can talk about a subject and not feel intimidated.” – Peer Leader in Training

“The best experience that I've had in PLTL workshop is seeing the look on students' faces when they understand a problem that I guided them through.” – Peer Leader

“I love watching people work together to understand a concept and see the look of confidence when they can explain it to the others.” – Peer Coordinator

Reference

Roth, V., Goldstein, E., & Marcus, G. (2001) *Peer-led Team Learning: A Handbook for Team Leaders*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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