



PLTLIS NEWLETTER

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Peer Leaders Present at the 2YC3 Fall 2018 Symposium at the University of New Mexico-Valencia



Over the second weekend in October, 21 Peer Leaders from the Chemistry PLTL Program at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) travelled north to New Mexico to present a three-hour Active Engagement Session at the Fall 2018 American Chemical Society 2YC3 Symposium (the 221st) in Los Lunas, NM. The 21 undergraduates, all majors in STEM disciplines, designed, organized and led the entire Session as they immersed the audience of chemistry faculty, from a dozen two-year campuses from around the US, in vignettes explaining how they facilitate active learning in first- and second-semester general chemistry. The Saturday, October 13, 2018, Session began with oral presentations describing the almost twenty-year history of the UTEP PLTL Program, the long-term benefits to the Leaders, and the unique Workbook mechanism used to fund the Program. For the last hour, the Leaders subdivided the audience members into small groups, engaging them in a gallery walk of simultaneous hands-on active presentations of activities: games (chemis-triangles, jemistry [chemical jeopardy], spoons [a card game about chemical nomenclature]), learning manuals, and two colorful chemical explorations.

Now imagine for a moment that as a PLTL practitioner, you or your Leaders organized for some conference or meeting a presentation to showcase your PLTL program just like these Leaders did for the 221st 2YC3 Meeting. What would this look like? What are the essentials of your PLTL Program? We challenge you to spread awareness of the Peer-Led Team Learning model in your region!

- Jim Becvar, President, PLTLIS

My Reflections on the 2YC3 Meeting Cassandra Orozco, Peer Leader



1 - Cassandra Orozco explaining to chemistry faculty at 2YC3 why she enjoys being a peer leader

I had the opportunity to sit among chemistry professors at the 2YC3 conference in Los Lunas, New Mexico on Saturday, October 13, 2018. I got to see the perspective of how professors feel about certain chemistry topics. For example, one professor stated, "I think organic nomenclature is very boring to teach." Another commented, "There is no point in teaching significant figures." I was told by Dr. Larkowski, from Murray State University (Murray, Kentucky), something very inspiring, "One of the hardest things about teaching is that you forget what it is like not to know." I do not want to forget what it is like not to know, because then it will be hard for me to be in someone else's shoes who is lost. People who are experienced and teach will not understand why students struggle. Dr. Larkowski also stated, "The best teachers are the ones who listen." I would like to reflect on that because I can learn to listen to other peers and see where they are struggling.

When I was about to present in front of chemistry professors, my face started to feel very numb and I felt like passing out. I sat near my mentor and told her I was super nervous, and she told me to take deep breaths. So, there I sat, with my head down, and closed my eyes. I took slow deep breaths trying to ease my nervousness. The presenter before me was still presenting and in my mind, I begged for her to present longer. I was pleased when people were asking questions. Then she finished, and I froze in my chair until my professor announced my name and I got up with purpose. I thought to myself, "All right, I need to toughen up. I am about to deliver a message." After I introduced myself I said something that I do not remember, but I realized I had caught the attention of all the professors. They all looked up at me very interested in what I had to say. I suddenly had a spark of confidence and I just carried on naturally with my presentation. Everything went by very smoothly and I facilitated a hands-on, team-based activity as if I had done it many times. I was happy that the professors were asking me questions and were having a good time participating in my activity. My professor told me he was proud of me and my mentor gave me a smile. She looked proud. From then on, even though it was my second time doing an oral presentation, I told myself I want to keep going to conferences to share my ideas with the public. I want to spark curiosity and interest. I want to do this again.



Julian Perez, a first-time peer leader in fall 2018, explains the “Spoons” game to Dr. Tracy Terry, one of the UNM-Valencia organizers of the 221st2YC3. Standing behind Julian are Alejandro Marin Sanchez, creator of the Spoons game and Mariana Gallegos. Julian, Alex, and Mariana are peer leaders for first semester general chemistry.



Mariel Garcia, Peer Leader for second semester general chemistry, explains the ‘Chemis-Tri’ triangles learning game to Dr. Jerry Godbout, UNM-Valencia chemistry professor and co-organizer of the 221st 2YC3 meeting, at one of the breakout stations on the gallery walk of learning.



Alejandro Marin Sanchez discusses PLTL with 2YC3 attendees as Jaime Ayala adds encouragement.



Omar Marin Sanchez used one of the gallery walk stations at 2YC3 to show colorful halogen reactions to facilitate understanding of oxidation and reduction processes.



Ashley Baker and Amanda Alfsen, Peer Leaders for first semester general chemistry, represented one station in the Gallery Walk for Learning at the 221st 2YC3 Conference. Here they are explaining to attendees the benefits for mastering the content of the course found in their Guide for Active Learning in General Chemistry.

Contribute to Weaving Together Best Practices! Submit your Abstract at www.pltlis.org

8th Annual PLTLIS Conference to be held at IUPUI, Indianapolis, Indiana

Thursday – Saturday, June 6-8, 2019

Pre-Conference Workshop: Introduction to the PLTL Model

Wednesday, June 5, 2019

Joined by colleagues from around the world who are deeply invested in innovative and effective educational practices, the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society's (PLTLIS) Eighth Annual Conference will provide a platform for instructors, administrators, students and others to discuss educational reform using Peer Leaders. With this year's theme, "Weaving Together Best Practices" the nature of building Peer-Led Team Learning programs and communities with Peer Leaders as the centerpiece will be at the forefront of our discussions of research and practice. The concept of training undergraduates as effective facilitators of learning is a data-driven transformative pedagogical strategy. Submit your abstract to PLTLIS 2019! Immerse yourself in powerful discussions, while connecting with passionate educators, administrators, and students sharing their experiences and work in PLTL.

Hosted by Pratibha Varma-Nelson

Professor of Chemistry and Founding Executive Director

STEM Education Innovation Research Institute (SEIRI) at IUPUI

Ne'Shaun Jones, Chair, Conference Planning Committee

For more information, info@pltlis.org



Pre-Conference Workshop Introduction to The Peer-Led Team Learning Model Wednesday, June 5, 2019
— 1:00 - 5:00pm

The Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) model has been successfully implemented in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and other courses at a wide variety of institutions for over 25 years. The workshop will address the needs of beginners and what is needed to institutionalize a PLTL program, as well as the online adaptation, cyber PLTL. The PLTL model actively engages students in the learning process by having them solve carefully structured problems in small groups under the direction of a trained peer leader. Peer-led workshops are an effective way to engage large numbers of students with course material and each other. Improved performance and retention, development of communication and team skills, higher motivation and course satisfaction, and increased interest in pursuing further study in science and other disciplines are among the benefits of the PLTL approach. The workshop will provide the experience of a PLTL session with peer leaders who will be actively involved and will discuss their experiences with the PLTL model. Recruiting and training peer leaders, faculty roles and responsibilities, and issues surrounding the implementation and institutionalization of PLTL will be

discussed. Participants will be provided workshop materials. Bring a team, including a learning specialist and student leaders, to participate in this workshop.

Presenters include: James Becvar, University of Texas at El Paso; A.E. DREYFUSS, The Peer-Led Team Learning International Society; MITSUE NAKAMURA, University of Houston, Downtown; Pratibha Varma-Nelson, STEM Education Innovation & Research Institute at IUPUI & Peer Leaders. To register: www.pltlis.org. For more information contact info@ptlis.org

Agenda

(As of October 9, 2018)

Wednesday, June 5, 2019 – Pre-Conference Workshop

12:30 PM – 1:00 PM Registration

1:00 PM – 5:00 PM Introduction to the PLTL model

Thursday, June 6, 2019 – Day 1

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM Registration

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM Welcoming Remarks

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM Plenary Session & Workshop

10:45 AM – 12:30 PM Oral Presentations I

12:30 PM – 1:45 PM Lunch

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM Oral Presentations II

3:15 PM – 5:00 PM Poster Presentations & Reception

Friday, June 7, 2019 – Day 2

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM Light refreshments & registration

9:30 AM – 9:45 AM Day 2 Opening Remarks

9:45 AM – 12:30 PM Plenary Session

12:30 PM – 2:15 PM Lunch

2:15 PM – 3:15 PM Oral Presentations II

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM Oral Presentations IV

5:00 PM Tour of IUPUI

Saturday, June 8, 2019 – Day 3

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM Light refreshments & registration

9:30 AM – 10:00 AM Presentation: Where are we now?

10:00 AM – 11:45 PM Working Groups Presentation

11:45 AM – 12:15 PM Closing Remarks

12:15 PM – 1:15 PM Lunch 1:15 PM Group Event in Indianapolis Tour of IUPUI

1:30 PM – 5:30 PM PLTLIS Board of Directors Meeting

**PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY**
8TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

HOSTED BY
THE STEM EDUCATION INNOVATION AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT IUPUI
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA
THURSDAY · SATURDAY, JUNE 6-8, 2019

"WEAVING TOGETHER BEST PRACTICES"

Call for Presentations, Workshops, & Posters
Deadline to submit in order to receive feedback:
Friday, February 15, 2019
Submit at: PLTLIS.org

Among the threads to be explored are:

- Sustainability of PLTL campus programs
- Critical thinking, meta-cognition, and PLTL
- Discourse analysis including cyberPLTL
- PLTL and the sense of belonging
- Workplace skills development and PLTL
- Implementations in non-STEM disciplines

Questions? Contact:
Dr. Ne Shaun Jones, Conference Chair
info@pltlis.org

 **IUPUI**
THE INDIANAPOLIS
UNIVERSITY PUBLIC UNIVERSITY
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

 **PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY**

New Board Members



Volrick Higgs, PLTL Practitioner in non-STEM Discipline, Elected to the PLTLIS Board of Directors

Volrick Higgs was elected to the Board of Directors of the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society in June 2018, as a PLTL practitioner in a non-STEM discipline. Mr. Higgs is communication studies faculty at Miami Dade College (MDC) InterAmerican campus (IAC) in Miami, Florida, where he has worked since August 2015 teaching introductory communication studies and speech courses. He currently serves as a co-Principal Investigator for STEM-Mia, a National Science Foundation-funded project that provides scholarships and various supports to academically talented, low-income STEM students at MDC IAC. His teaching and research interests focus on the inseparable connections between human motivation, communication and individual and collective identity formation.

Mr. Higgs has been implementing PLTL into his speech communication courses at MDC since the summer of 2016 in an effort to boost student academic success and retention, particularly out of concern for the academic standing of many of his students who come from underprivileged, underrepresented, academically underprepared backgrounds and are non-native English speakers. He created materials to

focus on student-led communication research and rhetorical and critical/cultural analysis which resulted in the creation of an Annual Communication Research Symposium and publication of an interdisciplinary journal of student communication research. He continues to implement PLTL each semester, monitoring student progress and perceptions reported in their survey data to adapt the course to increase student communication-based self-efficacy beliefs. Students report a deeper understanding of course content and stronger interpersonal relationships because PLTL feels like a “safe space” for them to explore content in greater depth without judgment or feeling like they are being graded or monitored. They are often better able to draw connections to the relevance of communication course concepts to other disciplines such as philosophy as a result of their PLTL and classroom experiences.

Mr. Higgs served as a Peer Leader Faculty Expert with the Faculty Institute of Teaching and Learning from Spring 2017 to Fall 2018. In that role, he trained faculty and students to implement PLTL in STEM and humanities-based courses. He co-presented research on PLTL’s contributions to MDC’s student success, retention, and classroom perceptions during the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society’s sixth (2017) and seventh (2018) annual conferences, in Chicago and Dallas. Mr. Higgs holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Communication Studies from Florida Atlantic University where he serves as an adjunct professor teaching upper-division courses in rhetorical criticism and contemporary rhetorical theory.

A Brief Interview with Volrick Higgs, with thanks to Dr. Kimberly Lanier, Director, Faculty Institute of Teaching and Learning, MDC, IAC who posed the following questions.

KL: Why did you decide to implement PLTL in your course?

VH: When I first started at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus, I realized I needed to invest time in and commit to pedagogical growth. I knew I needed to motivate students in their voice, in ways they could identify with, and I knew that I needed to offer additional academic support so that students could meet high academic standards. PLTL offered an exciting opportunity to engage students through active and collaborative learning with peer mentors who have already succeeded in my class who could serve as an inspiration.

KL: What has been the benefit to students who participate(d) in PLTL sessions?

VH: Academically, students who have participated in PLTL have excelled in my course and been able to make connections between my course content and processes and other courses they have taken. For example, at the end of one semester, I walked into a session and overheard students discussing Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.” They were drawing connections between philosophy and critical, theoretical course concepts we had been haggling with all semester in my speech communication course. The critical-thinking skills students hone and the reflexivity they develop are all important benefits. Interpersonally, they have grown by forging bonds with peers that last even after the course is completed.

KL: What has been the benefit to Peer Leaders you have mentored?

VH: I have had the pleasure of watching Peer Leaders blossom tremendously. Peer leaders deepened their knowledge of communication theories and practices. They also developed strong leaderships and interpersonal relationships. All of my Peer Leaders have transferred on to four-year universities or continued on to get their bachelor's degree at MDC.

KL: How has the Faculty Institute for Teaching and Learning (FITL) contributed to your professional growth?

VH: Working with FITL has helped me in numerous ways. First, FITL has offered training and mentorship that has helped me chart my professional course as an instructor, an academic and a researcher. By providing training in PLTL and Differentiated Instruction, FITL has not just given me a set of tools to empower my students to succeed, it has also facilitated in my a paradigm shift in me. I now see my role as so much than just a teacher of communication theories and practices; I realize that I have to create a holistic experience that sparks students interest in lifelong learning. Through its work, FITL, has given me the skills to do that. Also, because of the educational research opportunities I have had through FITL, I have developed research interests that intersect between communication studies and pedagogy. The experiences preparing data for conference presentation and presenting at two PLTLIS conferences have piqued my interest in further research and even contributed to my interest in and selection to serve as an educational research on the College's newly award STEM-Mia grant. I am truly thankful for FITL for inspiring me to invest time in developing as an instructor.

KL: You were asked by the PLTLIS leadership to serve on the Board of Directors. Professionally, how did that make you "feel?"

VH: I was honored by the request to serve in a leadership capacity with PLTLIS because it suggests that others are moved by the stories of what we have been able to accomplish at MDC. We have worked hard to drum up and sustain support for PLTL. The request also suggests that my work in a non-STEM discipline has value within the organization and that means the world to me.

KL: What impact do you hope to have as a Board Member in general?

VH: As a Board Member, I hope to develop connections between the organization and non-STEM disciplines, so that the organization's commitment to this specific type of active learning strategy can incorporate humanities-based disciplines which are equally important and challenging as STEM. I also hope to assist in the Board in developing its outreach efforts by developing communication strategies that spread awareness for the excelling value of PLTL.

KL: As a Board Member, what impact do you hope to have at IAC?

VH: I hope my service as a Board Member will better help me develop strategies for assisting in the creation of a sustainable PLTL program even after the grant is over. Since PLTL has become such a central part of our student success and retention efforts, I would like to actively participate in ensuring it thrives for many years to come. I think that my connections to PLTLIS and its vast network will be an invaluable resource for me in that regard.

Peer Leader Amanda Alfsen Elected to the PTLIS Board of Directors



I was introduced to Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) one year ago in my general chemistry course at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). I am a psychology major with minors in biology and chemistry. My general chemistry workshop experience assisted me in mastering the concepts taught in lecture and developing vital studying skills and strategies that I would later apply to other courses. This semester I facilitate learning in two workshops for first-semester General Chemistry.

As the student representative for the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society, my goal is to educate others about PLTL and increase networking between established programs. I hope to do this by contributing to literature, such as this newsletter, making the presentations from our yearly conferences available online, and creating a question and answer section on our website. I am extremely passionate about PLTL because I have experienced and witnessed the benefits of this program. Having a PLTL program is an amazing opportunity that more universities should make available to their students.

Pratibha Varma-Nelson is the winner of the 2018 George C. Pimentel Award in Chemical Education. This award, sponsored by Cengage Learning and the ACS Division of Chemical Education, recognizes outstanding contributions to chemical education.



2 - Left to right: Peter Dorhout, ACS president 2018; Pratibha Varma-Nelson; Maureen McLaughlin, representative from Cengage, sponsor of the award; and Cheryl Frech, Chair of DivCHED (Division of Chemical education at the ACS).

Pratibha Varma-Nelson, professor of chemistry, and founding Executive Director of STEM Education Innovation and Research Institute at IUPUI in Indianapolis, Indiana, is one of the original practitioners of Peer-Led Team Learning.

In recognition of the George C. Pimentel award, a symposium was held on Tuesday, March 20th, 2018 in New Orleans, Louisiana and featured speakers who have intersected with Pratibha's efforts in promoting Peer-Led Team Learning and chemical education over the past twenty years. Speakers and their topics included the following:

Susan Hixson, Support by the National Science Foundation for the development of peer-led team learning

Anthony Chase, Transferrable skills gained from experience as a peer-leader in a PLTL program: Reflections, applications, and long-term impacts on professional lives

Brian Coppola, *Attending to the subject*

Mark Cracolice, *Theoretical cognitive foundations for peer-led team learning*

Joseph Dinnocenzo, *Peer-led team learning applied to laboratory instruction*

Ingrid Druwe, *Oh, the places you'll go: The dissemination and implementation of the peer led team learning project, a unique student-faculty partnership*

Joseph Kinsella, *PLTL: Experience from both sides of the desk*

Jennifer Lewis, *Peer-led team learning and Pratibha Varma-Nelson - irrepressible and resilient*

Kevin Mauser and John Sours, *From face-to-face to online: Collaboration in design and implementation of cPLTL*

Richard Moog, *Three Big P's: POGIL, PLTL, and Pratibha*

Simon Rhodes, *Peer-led team learning in science and engineering at IUPUI*

Susan Rodger, *Implementation and evolution of PLTL in introductory computer science courses*

Gabriela Weaver, *Course-based undergraduate research via the CASPIE Project: From idea inception to cross-institutional networks*

Sarah Wilson, *Assessing the development of curved-arrow formalism mastery among first-semester organic chemistry PLTL and cPLTL students*

Donald Wink, *Bringing peer learning into the laboratory and research setting*

Lance Shipman Young, *A multidisciplinary intervention to ensure success in STEM gatekeeper courses at Morehouse College*

Pratibha Varma-Nelson, *Award Address. Reflections on a non-traditional academic career: Lessons for the future*

For more information on the STEM Education Innovation & Research Institute, visit <https://seiri.iupui.edu/>

For more information on the George C. Pimentel Award in Chemical Education, visit <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/funding-and-awards/awards/national/bytopic/george-c-pimentel-award-in-chemical-education.html>

For IUPUI's release, visit https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2018-03/iuui-iso031918.php

We exist to assist students and programs devoted to group active learning paradigm. In that regard we invite you to make contact with us for any concern or interest you may have.

We would love to hear from you.

Peer Led Team Learning International Society

11200 SW 8 ST.; OE 167

Miami, FL 33199

info@pltlis.org

[VISIT OUR WEBSITE](#)