

The Peer Leader

volume 1

From the President

This newsletter, piloted over the past year, now has a name: *The Peer Leader*, thanks to the suggestion of founding Board of Directors member Tony West. Tony, a pictographer, was introduced to Peer-Led Team Learning through Ellen Goldstein West, one of the learning specialists instrumental in the initiation of training practices for Peer Leaders. Tony West is the creator of several of the videos on the PLTLIS website, depicting PLTL practitioners and programs at several campuses between 2011 and 2012. See *PLTL in Practice* to see how he shares many people's voices in promoting PLTL, work for which the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society remains indebted to him and Ellen.

In an effort to defray Peer Leaders' costs to attend the 8th Annual Conference, Peer Leaders can apply for Travel Awards: see below for more information.

The Peer-Led Team Learning International Society is piloting new directions in advocating and promoting PLTL practitioners. Work has been ongoing this year focusing on how best to implement a process for certification of Peer Leaders; setting up a store for the sales of workbooks and other items; and developing cross-campus collaborations. There is also an updated look on the website thanks to Pablo Benitez, webmaster.

The theme of the 2019 Annual Conference is Weaving Together Best Practices, and we look forward to sharing our practices and learning about new directions for Peer-Led Team Learning. See you in Indianapolis!

Jim Becvar

Professor, Chemistry Department

University of Texas, El Paso

President, PLTLIS, 2017-2019

*We welcome you to this first issue of *The Peer Leader*!*

From the Editor and the Publisher, May 2019

We welcome you to this first issue of *The Peer Leader*! Because the Peer Leader is the emblem of the PLTL model in facilitating the interactions of the group, promoting the role with the title of the newsletter is clearly appropriate.

In this issue, thanks to a donation, Peer Leaders can apply for **travel grants to the 8th Annual Conference. More information is below and on the website. DEADLINE for applications is May 17th.**

Profiled here are PLTLIS Board member Usman Hyder, current Peer Leader Chandana Tatineni, and Rezwon I. Bhuiyan who writes about the transition from Peer Leader to the workplace. Amanda Alfsen shares her work in supporting Peer Leaders at the University of Texas at El Paso with a Guide for Peer Leaders.

We invite you to contribute to *The Peer Leader* – profiling your program, its practitioners, as well as news and other information, including announcements of positions.

Peer Leaders On The Move!

In addition, please share the newsletter with your colleagues on-campus, through professional associations and others who may be interested.

Contact us at info@pltlis.org and Welcome!

A.E. Dreyfuss and Thomas Pitzer

Past Presidents, PLTLIS

- Amanda Alfsen shares her work in supporting Peer Leaders at the University of Texas at El Paso with a Guide for Peer Leaders.
- Usman Hyder, formerly a Peer Leader at the University of Texas at Dallas, is now a graduate student at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, Texas, working on a Ph.D. in Genetics, Development, and Disease. He was the second Peer Leader Representative to the PLTLIS Board of Directors and is now the Secretary of the Board.
- **Chandana Tatineni** has been a Peer leader in Physics (PHYS 1302) since Fall 2017 and a team leader since Fall 2018 at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), where she double majors in Neuroscience and Psychology.
- **Rezwon Bhuiyan invites other former Peer Leaders to join the Alumni Network Task Force and shares his journey to his current position at an aerospace company.**
- **Amanda Alfsen, the Peer Leader Representative to the Board (2018-2019) and currently at the University of Texas at El Paso, wrote *A Peer Leader's Guide to Active-Learning in General Chemistry Workshops* will enhance and standardize workshops at UTEP.**

Weaving Together Best Practices

Eighth Annual PLTLIS Conference, Thursday-Saturday, June 6-8, 2019, in Indianapolis

[Pre-Conference Workshop: Introduction to Peer-Led Team Learning, June 5, 2019](#)

Educational Travel Grants Available! Apply by May 17th to come to the 8th Annual Conference!

Travel Grants are available from the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society (PLTLIS) for Undergraduate Peer Leaders, preferably to support travel to make presentations at the 2019 Conference. This is a very valuable experience for students. This Travel Grant opportunity is to assist students with the cost of travel and help pay registration fee(s) for the 2019 PLTLIS Annual Meeting. PLTLIS will make one-time awards of up to \$500.00 per Peer Leader on a first-come first-served basis.

Eligibility

- Applicants must be enrolled in an undergraduate degree program and must be progressing toward the degree.
- The Travel Grant should support the presentation of applicant's research in learning at PLTLIS 2019.

<https://pltlis.org/blog/2019/04/12/peer-leader-travel-awards/>

Applicants should apply no later than May 17th. Those proposals demonstrating the highest quality will be funded until available funds are exhausted.

Applicants should provide:

- A completed Travel Grant Application Form (<https://pltlis.org/blog/2019/04/12/peer-leader-travel-awards/>)
- A one-page Essay describing the impact the Peer Leader experience has had on the Applicant (~250 words);
- Budget for the expected expenses of attending the 2019 PLTLIS conference
- A letter of support from a mentor, staff, or faculty mentor

Among applications of similar quality, preference will be given to Applicants who:

- Have not been funded previously for travel support by PLTLIS,
- Are presenting original research as principal author at the PLTLIS 2019 Conference,

Completed Application packages (the Essay, the Form, Budget, and the Support Letter – see below) should be submitted to: info@pltlis.org

Peer Leader in Physics and Team Leader



Chandana Tatineni has been a Peer leader in Physics (PHYS 1302) since Fall 2017 and a team leader since Fall 2018 at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), where she double majors in Neuroscience and Psychology. Additionally, Chandana has been a leader in the Office of Student Volunteerism at UTD where she planned an alternative spring break for dozens of UTD students to volunteer in Houston, Texas. After graduation, she will be attending Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine to earn her Doctorate of Osteopathic Medicine.

Working as a physics PLTL leader also helped me increase my own knowledge and proficiency in physics.

Inspiring the next Peer Leaders was noted as Chandana's contribution. As the PLTL Team Leader for PHYS 1302 in the Fall 2019 noted, "One of the biggest reasons I want to be a PLTL Team Leader is because of the incredible example that my own team leader, Chandana T., set for me. As a rookie PLTL leader last semester, I was very apprehensive to guide Physics 1302 especially since that wasn't my first-choice subject, but my Team Leader truly made my first semester memorable. She prepared me for sessions by talking me through how she runs her sessions and exposed me to different challenges I may face and offered her solutions to those obstacles. She was always willing to help me if I was stuck with a problem and constantly gave constructive feedback so that I could improve as a leader. She made liaison meetings engaging and fostered a safe environment where I felt comfortable to discuss not only my issues with PLTL but also other aspects of my life. She made PLTL feel like home for me and I truly felt like I had a place as a leader in this program. Since then, I have wanted to be a Team Leader because I want to be able to provide that same level of guidance to other people."

Chandana states that, "leading physics PLTL has been such an honor. I never knew before whether I had the capacity to help others learn such complicated concepts of physics. It was really gratifying watching my students work together and trust each other in my sessions. Working as a physics PLTL leader also

helped me increase my own knowledge and proficiency in physics. I will be forever grateful to the Student Success Center at the University of Texas at Dallas for giving me this amazing opportunity.”

Usman Hyder, PLTLIS Board member and Secretary, is currently a Graduate Student at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, Texas, working on a Ph.D. in Genetics, Development, and Disease. Usman has always been interested in education and was involved in Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) when he was an undergraduate student at University of Texas, Dallas (in Richardson, Texas). He was an active leader and team leader for the general and organic chemistry PLTL Programs, running sessions and exam reviews, and helping other leaders improve their ability to facilitate understanding with the PLTL methodology. While attending the 2016 PLTLIS conference, Usman was elected the second Peer Leader Representative to the Board of Directors. After serving two years (2016-2018) as the Peer Leader Representative, Usman was elected to the position of Secretary of the Board.

“My goal is to become a faculty member at an undergraduate university, managing both a research lab and also teaching undergraduate classes. I hope to implement the PLTL model in my classrooms and hope to either start or support a PLTL program for the classes I am teaching as I know its value not only for students but also for university administration as retention rates (and overall student success) is heightened when PLTL is added as a supplement to a course. I hope to continue to support the Board’s effort in working on integrating PLTL onto new campuses and generating more “buzz” about the great things that PLTL leaders do each day.”



***A Peer Leader’s Guide to Active-Learning in General Chemistry Workshops* will help enhance and standardize workshops at UTEP.**

Amanda Alfsen, Peer Leader Representative (2018-2019), worked with other Peer Leaders at the University of Texas at El Paso to overcome what appeared to be a common problem. Peer Leaders did not use team-based strategies to facilitate learning but instead lectured, especially when students have allowed themselves to fall behind in the class content. As she explains:

“Workshops in chemistry at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) are designed to provide hands-on engaged learning for students to cement the principles taught within the lecture. However, there is the temptation for Peer Leaders to believe they facilitate learning by simply lecturing (rather than by using team-based strategies). *A Peer Leader’s Guide to Active-Learning in General Chemistry Workshops* will help enhance and standardize workshops at UTEP. Each section is divided into topics for which there are a brief set of notes, example problems, activities, and videos. The purpose of this guide is to encourage active-learning in workshops. Having an activities book made available to all peer leaders is also an efficient way of keeping records of all the innovations that occur throughout the semesters, giving credit to the creators of the activities, and providing all current and future peer leaders with ideas to implement in their workshops.”

For more information on creating a Peer Leader’s Guide for your course, contact us at info@pltlis.org.

The Ongoing Journey of a Peer Leader

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” – Lao Tzu.

Being a Peer Leader is not just a title. It is a commitment. As peer leaders, we have been given the opportunity to share our experiences and support each other as more than just colleagues. Together, through any obstacle, we embark on a journey. Day by day, step by step. Here is my story.

My name is Rezwon Islam Bhuiyan, a former peer leader. I graduated from the City College of New York (CCNY), City University of New York (CUNY) in December 2018 with a bachelor’s in electrical engineering degree. Currently, I am an engineer at Northrop Grumman in the Electrical Design Technology department. Becoming an engineer was my career goal, and I am going to share with you how Peer Led-Team Learning (PLTL) and my personal motivation helped to reach my goal.

Growing up, a few of my family members were either studying Engineering or already Engineers –they were role models to me. I was attracted to science and technology and was a tinkerer as a teenager. I used to open batteries and connect LEDs to my bicycle. In high school and college, I was good at Mathematics and Physics, and started considering becoming an engineer.

It was my pleasure to have wonderful professors in my college life, which began at New York City College of Technology (City Tech), CUNY. My Calculus professor recognized my enthusiasm for Mathematics and urged me to apply to the PLTL program. Becoming a Peer Leader in Mathematics was the platform whereby I developed the professional skills needed to become an Engineer.

PLTL taught me that the best way of learning is to help others to learn. I participated in pedagogical training which helped me to understand different learning techniques and theories. Participating in the PLTL program also helped me to build better studying practices. In addition, I had opportunities to do research and present posters at PLTLIS and other conferences, also enhancing my public speaking skills. I still remember how nervous I was during my first presentation in front of about fifty people, even though it was a group presentation.

I transferred to CCNY from City Tech to complete my engineering degree, but there was no PLTL program there. Yet through connections made with City Tech’s PLTL program, I have had the

opportunity to co-author a Physics workbook, working with another Peer Leader and a professor. It was a wonderful experience.

Those skills learned from being a Peer Leader helped me during my job interviews. Most of the interviewers were interested in three basic qualities: 1) Being a team player. Not only engineers but most professionals work in teams and new hires must be able to collaborate in the workplace comfortably. I can strongly say that every Peer Leader of the City Tech program learned how to work in a team. 2) Being organized – it's an important skill. A Peer Leader's relationships with their institution, professors, peers and colleagues develop organizational skills. My role during the workshop, training, preparation, follow-ups, sending proper emails, attending meetings, taking initiative during difficult situations, leadership – all are part of this organizational skill. Indeed, I was able to show my organizational skills during interview sessions by sharing my PLTL related experiences. 3) Mastering time management. I was never late to any of my interviews. Good time management shows how responsible a person is, and interviewers want to see how responsible the interviewee is. A good interviewee will focus on his/her good qualities during the interview by sharing relatable experiences. I believe that experience as a Peer Leader offers enough experiences to face the interview confidently.

Now, I will tell you three things that I did to get my current position. Firstly, I searched to find something that interests me the most, something that I am passionate about. Later, I researched the career opportunities related to that interest. My interest was designing RF (radio frequency) circuits. So, my job search was related to RF engineering. Secondly, I avoided applying for positions with companies just because of their fame. I was only interested in a company if it offers what I want.

Thirdly, I recognized that I made a lot of mistakes in my college journey, but I was not afraid of making mistakes. There were moments when I was feeling hopeless just because I was rejected after interviews and it was hard to find the dream job. Finding jobs can be hard. I was patient and attended every job interview. Every interview was a new learning experience for me, and I tried to apply the lessons to the next one. Consequently, I became good at interviewing. During my time in college I attended almost twenty job interviews. At the beginning surely the response wasn't good, but in the end, I got many job offers. My request to you if you are finding yourself hopeless – keep trying and practice more. You will reach your goal in the end.

PLTL was the first step for many other opportunities for me. I started my journey with PLTL, and it helped me to reach my goal. However, my journey didn't stop yet. Now, it's time for me to return the favor to the program. Several former Peer Leaders at several campuses are discussing how best to develop an **Alumni Network of Peer Leaders through the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society**. What benefit could former Peer Leaders provide to current Peer Leaders? Would career advice be welcomed? Would knowing someone was a former Peer Leader help future Peer Leaders in building awareness of PLTL and spread the benefits? Email me at info@pltlis.org, I am waiting for your response.

From left: – “PLTL”

JoeNathan Abellard, Ricky Santana, Rezwon I. Bhuiyan, Awolou Sossa

April 2014



1 - From left: – “PLTL” JoeNathan Abellard, Ricky Santana, Rezwon I. Bhuiyan, Awolou Sossa April 2014