

# July 2020



PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING  
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

## The Peer Leader

### Issue No. 8

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## Message from the President

Dear PLTLIS community,

In this issue of *The Peer Leader*, we share the discussion that took place on June 10th in a virtual Open House, hosted by PLTLIS Board member Milka Montes. The reporting is by Mikayla Rodriguez, the Coordinator of the PLTL program at University of Texas of the Permian Basin. She shared the following with us as an introduction:

*To all of our students, leaders, educators, administration, and every single person who was affected by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic: We are so proud of you. You survived the semester that no one expected, and it was anything but easy. On the contrary, it was frustrating, chaotic, and at times even a bit scary. We are resilient, and together we will move forward and take with us the many lessons we learned during this chaotic time- implementing them to be courageous and innovative toward education and the world of academia.*

A second Open House for anyone involved with Peer-Led Team Learning is scheduled for Tuesday, August 4th. Details are below. Join the discussion and share your thoughts in getting ready for the upcoming semester.

Warm regards,

Marcelo

Marcelo Sztainberg

Northeastern Illinois University

President, Board of Directors

[WWW.PLTLLIS.ORG](http://WWW.PLTLLIS.ORG)

## Join Us – Next Open House (Virtually Speaking)

**Tuesday, August 4, 2020**

**4:00 pm CDT**

**Theme: Preparing for the Fall Semester**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86436478204?pwd=UXBZdTV4Tzg4R1ptYmtSVC9HWjdiQT09>

Contact Mikayla Rodriguez if you have a question: [rodriguez\\_mi@utpb.edu](mailto:rodriguez_mi@utpb.edu)

## Report from the First Virtual Open House – June 10, 2020

Suggested by Milka Montes, Professor of Chemistry at University of Texas of the Permian Basin, a virtual Open House was held via Zoom. Peer Leaders from Northeastern Illinois University and University of Texas at El Paso discussed their experiences in the spring 2020 semester. Also participating were faculty from the University of Texas at El Paso and University of Texas of the Permian Basin, and PLTLIS Board members.

**The Semester of COVID-19:** *Unexpected. Hectic. Challenging.* These are just a few words to describe the semester's themes following the move to online classes and PLTL workshop sessions.

**Challenges of Online Education:** The unexpected shift to online classes posed many challenges for students, instructors, and Peer Leaders: a myriad of technical difficulties, reduced attendance, tardiness and lack of participation, loss of motivation and drive, more available means to dishonest participation in classwork and exams.

Dania de la Hoya (UTEP) noted that as a Peer Leader, *"I struggled changing to online classes because when I do my workshops [face-to-face] I like walking around the room, explaining things with my hands, and go up to them one by one to see how they are doing."*

Changing methods proved difficult. *“I felt like I did not have the right to demand them [students] all to have their cameras. But going forward I think that there needs to be a requirement to help students pay attention and also to bring back a more personal element that normally happens in face-to-face workshops,”* Enid Martinez added. *“I believe that the online learning diminished the ability to provide feedback when [students] were working out a problem,”* said Amanda Alfsen. *“I believe it may be detrimental to the students’ learning.”*

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*“I felt like I did not have the right to demand them [students] all to have their cameras.”*

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**Demanding Creativity:** Transitioning to online/remote learning challenged instructors and Peer Leaders to think creatively in their methods of presenting relevant material as well as administering quizzes and exams. A clear decrease in student engagement and participation posed many questions regarding how to re-inspire students via online platforms, in ways in which they can enjoy themselves while simultaneously acquiring the necessary information to succeed as students.

Priscilla Parada stated that *“Even before online instruction we struggled with keeping students engaged. If anything, on an online platform we need to be more creative and put more effort into that [student engagement].”* John Podurski shared how online workshops may foster students searching Google for answers: *“Being that it is remote, you do lose a bit of the ‘Hey, you need to know this’ for class. They understood that you need to study to pass the classes, you can’t look up answers on Google in face-to-face [workshops].”*

**Cheating Culture:** Chemistry has a reputation of being difficult to understand and hard to master, which may result in incoming chemistry students feeling insecure. As a result, students may accept cheating on course work as an alternative to understanding difficult concepts-contrary to what higher education is intended to be. It is important to note that this cultural behavior is found in students collectively and is not exclusive to chemistry.

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*“For some students that are shy I saw that the online [workshops] were more beneficial.”*

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Priscilla Parada commented that *“I think that cheating is kind of the culture among students, but I think changing that culture with our students is important. Ultimately this is your [students’] education.”*

**Inspiring Confident Students:** To counteract a cheating culture among students, participating in Peer-Led Team Learning workshop sessions may inspire confidence in understanding concepts. *“I think it is our duty as peer leaders to at least try and convey the same atmosphere, and set the high standards for students to study and learn the material, and be able to do it with confidence and without needing notes or a cheat sheet,”* Amanda Alfsen commented.

**Silver Linings:** PLTL sessions provided some positive outcomes. *“Using Blackboard for online quizzes and homework makes it easier to keep track of and input quizzes and homework,”* stated Ashley Baker, *“Especially because we still have our own classes to study for.”* John Podurski mentioned that more

introverted students who may be less inclined to ask questions or participate in face-to-face workshops. *“For some students that are shy I saw that the online [workshops] were more beneficial. The fact that they could email me or text me made them a bit more comfortable. I saw them benefit from that.”* This observation is an important highlight for educators and could potentially aid in reducing anxiety for introverted learners.

Participating Peer Leaders included Amanda Alfsen (UTEP), Ashley Baker (UTEP), Dania de la Hoya (UTEP), Enid Martinez (UTEP) Priscilla Parada (UTEP), John Podurski (Northeastern Illinois University), and Evanie Rodriguez (UTEP). Other participants included Chinedu Chukuigwe (PLTLIS Director, Clientbucket, NYC), Dr. James Becvar (UTEP), Dr. Daniel Carbajal (Post-doctoral Fellow, UTEP), Dr. Milka Montes (UTPB), and Dr. Tesfaye Degefa (UTPB).

## Publications List is Updated

One feature of the PLTLIS website is the list of publications about Peer-Led Team Learning; these papers, book chapters, and dissertations either directly use the PLTL model or expand its adaptation for use to meet issues in specific environments. There is also a growing number of publications reporting on incorporating PLTL in other countries outside the U.S.A. –in Ethiopia, the Philippines, and elsewhere.

Publications from 2019 and 2020 have been added, and additional papers published in other years will continue to be added.

Visit <https://pltlis.org/publications/> to see the expanding dynamism of research of the PLTL model.

## Peer Leading as a Professional Accomplishment

PLTLIS’s Board of Directors recently reached out through LinkedIn to learn about the long-term career benefits students receive from the experience of peer leading. Dozens of former Peer Leaders proudly showcase their peer leading accomplishments as part of their professional portfolio. One former Peer Leader, Pooja Jairam, now in medical school at Columbia University's Vagelos College of Physicians & Surgeons, replied with this statement:

### **Pooja Jairam**



*1 - Pooja Jairam, former Peer Leader, Washington University,*

*M.D. Candidate, Class of 2021*

*Columbia University, Vagelos College of Physicians & Surgeons*

*Peer Leader' Experience: Standing Out from the Crowd*

**University of Texas at El Paso**

As a former PLTL leader at Washington University in St. Louis, I learned what effective teaching is. It is not simply giving didactics to students, but rather encouraging them to learn from their peers and giving them the ability to realize that they can solve problems independently.

I have carried this teaching style with me throughout medical school and I have also practiced these principles as a learner. Because medical school involves a significant amount of self-directed learning, it is vital to have confidence in your own problem-solving abilities.

### **Karina Monticone**



*2 - Karina Monticone, Peer Leader, General Chemistry*

When I applied to Physician Assistant programs last year, I knew I had to stand out from the crowd. Every candidate had an astonishing GPA, was involved in areas of research, and contributed community service hours. Since I was part of the UTEP PLTL program, I knew I could use that as an advantage to showcase what I can offer to any program. I would talk about what I would do during workshops and what my responsibilities were. However, it appeared that no matter how I described the PLTL program, my interviewer did not grasp just how unique the program was until I brought out my General Chemistry workbook. I would show them my published name and let them go through the workbook to see what work we did with chemistry students. Every time I brought out my workbook, my interviewer would ask me more questions and got to know me better as a candidate.

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*You never know what your workbook and the PLTL program experience can do for you as a candidate for a position.*

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I had applied to several schools and was accepted in several programs. I knew that my idea to bring my workbook to interviews played a pivotal role in why I was accepted. When August comes around, I will be attending the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Physician Assistant Program. I picked this program since their learning methodologies aligned with what I was already familiar with. Their main focus in teaching is through team-based learning and active listening lectures. Team-based learning is an important part of medicine and I wanted to attend a school that values teamwork as much as I do. In the world of medicine, nothing can be done if you do not have a team beside you.

If you have ever wondered how to prepare for an interview, consider practicing multiple questions from different angles and bringing your workbook with you. You never know what your workbook and the PLTL program experience can do for you as a candidate for a position.