

The Peer Leader



PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

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Issue No. 10 Contact: info@pltlis.org

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Message from the Chair, Conference Committee

Dear PLTLIS Community,

A new month and the prospect of new collaborations and learning opportunities are upon us.

It is with great pleasure that the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society announces our Ninth Annual Conference entitled "Crossing Boundaries, Building Networks."

This year's conference will be unique: we are very excited to share what we have learned about Peer-Led Team Learning in the virtual setting. We invite you to share with us your experiences by joining us at the conference. We encourage you to submit your abstract for poster or oral presentations and/or videos featuring the great things happening at your campus.

I am excited to see your contributions at the conference.

Milka O. Montes, Ph.D.

PLTLIS President-Elect

WWW.PLT LIS.ORG

Call for Campus Videos for the 9th Annual Conference

Hosted Online June 2-5, 2021

As one of the features for this year's conference, celebrate your PLTL program! Enlist Peer Leaders and students to produce a video which will be available throughout the duration of the conference. A featured networking session will provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions and share information on the variety of programs and their implementation.

For many PLTL programs, 2021 marks anniversaries – is your program celebrating its 20th? 15th? 10th? Creating a video is a way of marking the continuing success of your program and a way to share your practice with others who are considering implementing Peer-Led Team Learning.

More information is available at <https://pltlis.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Call-for-Video.pdf>

Crossing Boundaries, Building Networks

In an ever-changing global landscape, it is crucial for educators to build a network of practitioners and communicate with educators from different cultural backgrounds. Building international connections will help disseminate exciting new practices and opportunities for learning and enriching the quality of the student and instructor experience.

The Peer-Led Team Learning International Society's Ninth Annual Conference provides a forum for practitioners and researchers, including faculty, learning specialists/developers, administrators, Peer Leaders, teachers, and others, using various forms of peer-led learning.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSIONS DEADLINE EXTENDED TO MAY 10TH

<https://pltlis.org/call-for-papers/>

Abstracts from all areas of practice of peer-led learning are welcomed. Submissions for oral presentations and workshops are encouraged to be interactive. All submissions will be peer-reviewed.

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION RATES EXTENDED TO MAY 17TH

<https://pltlis.org/registration-form/>

Pre-Conference Workshop: Wednesday, June 2nd, 2021

Support PLTLIS: Amazon Smiles & Donations

Do you purchase from Amazon? Here is something you can do to help the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society (PLTLIS). When you log on to Amazon, use [smile.amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/smile), instead of www.amazon.com. This allows for 0.5% of your purchase to go to a charity of your choosing, without affecting your purchase price! Choose the Peer-Led Learning International Society when selecting the charity/non-profit.

Those small amounts add up and will strengthen the ability of the Society to help fund more Peer Leaders. Thank you for considering this painless way of helping the Society help students!

Preparation for Peer Leaders at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri: The *Seminar in Academic Mentoring (SAM)* course

The Seminar in Academic Mentoring (SAM) course at Washington University in St. Louis started in the Fall 2003 semester by Professor Gina Frey (now at The University of Utah, <https://chem.utah.edu/directory/frey/>), and is taught every fall semester by instructors of the three PLTL programs in Chemistry, Calculus, and Physics. Each program has its own SAM section, carries one unit of credit, and is mandatory for all first-time Peer Leaders.

SAM is a course that prepares and trains Peer Leaders as they navigate their first semester as workshop facilitators and creates a community of practice. The course meets weekly, and students learn about facilitation and inclusion topics such as learning theories that support the mission of PLTL, how to foster a growth mindset, factors that affect retention in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and how PLTL helps address those, group dynamics and how to make modifications to harmonize interactions between PLTL group members. Peer Leaders also help each other by discussing issues that have come up during the workshops, and the novice Peer Leaders and instructors provide advice to each other on facilitation best practices.

The culmination of the SAM course is the SAM book, a final project for the Peer Leaders for which everyone works together to decide topics of advice to pass on to the next group of novice Peer Leaders. The completed books for the General Chemistry PLTL program can be found at this link: <https://circle.wustl.edu/projects/peer-led-team-learning/peer-leader-training-books/>. These books serve as the textbook for each SAM course, and the students use the book, what they learn in SAM, and their own experiences to plan the next SAM book. The students take ownership of this project in deciding the contents and the organization of the book. The course instructors assist in the assignment of students for authoring an essay for specific sections of the book, as well as compiling the book once everyone submits their essays.

In this way, Peer Leaders are fully supported throughout their journeys as workshop facilitators.

A qualitative study of the books was undertaken to discover the common themes regarding the best advice that has been used and tested by Peer Leaders at Washington University in St. Louis: Szteinberg, G., Repice, M. D., Hendrick, C., Meyerink, S., & Frey, R. F. (2020). Peer Leader Reflections on Promoting Discussion in Peer Group-Learning Sessions: Reflective and Practiced Advice through Collaborative Annual Peer-Advice Books. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 19(1), ar2.

The SAM course plays a crucial role in building community for the PLTL programs. As Peer Leaders facilitate workshops in subsequent semesters, their connections to each other and the instructors remain and we consider each other “PLTL family.” These family reunions happen weekly.

Peer Leaders take another course for every semester they facilitate workshops, titled “Practical Applications of Academic Mentoring” (PAM) (including during the semester when they have to take SAM), and in this course Peer Leaders simulate a PLTL workshop and work on the packet together. Dr. Megan Daschbach (<https://artsci.wustl.edu/faculty-staff/megan-daschbach>) is the director of the General Chemistry PLTL program as well as Senior Lecturer for the General Chemistry courses, and she leads the PAM course for General Chemistry Peer Leaders every week.

In this way, Peer Leaders are fully supported throughout their journeys as workshop facilitators. Instructors and Peer Leaders develop very important connections and trust that help ensure the strength and success of the PLTL program. We are a happy family.

Peer Leaders’ Experiences

Eliya Makabeh

Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri



Major: Biology-Neuroscience

Minors: Psychological Brain Sciences and Marketing

I got involved in peer leading because I have enjoyed tutoring other students. Being a PLTL leader has been such an invaluable experience for me. Not only am I able to witness the light bulb go off in my student's heads, but I am also able to watch them gain confidence. Seeing how confident my students have gotten, not only in their abilities to solve problems in chemistry, but also in their ability to ask questions when they are confused, offer help when their peers are confused, answer questions that I ask or that their peers ask, or just cracking a joke via Zoom has been such an invaluable experience and I am so lucky to have gotten the opportunity to shape the lives (both academically and socially) of my students.

I especially love being a PLTL leader because it has allowed me to branch out and make friends from many different ages and backgrounds, which has been so interesting and fun for me. Being a PLTL leader

has taught me to be patient as well as to be comfortable with discomfort because it is okay to not know an answer immediately and that struggling is necessary to get better. The weekly SAM course was great as it allowed me to get the input of other leaders as they were always going through the same process and could relate to me.

Ephraim Oyetunji



Major: Neurobiology

My journey in peer leading began this past fall as a sophomore when I got the opportunity to lead my first cohort of students in general chemistry. Having such dedicated, encouraging peer leaders in my first year, I looked forward to one day doing the same for others. Though it was a new challenge to implement the same strategies in a virtual setting, I found that working together with new and veteran peer leaders provided me the necessary best practices for helping my students master the material. My SAM class was especially a fantastic resource to enhance my facilitation skills and grounded me in the mindset needed to successfully lead sessions.

With almost one year of peer leading under my belt, I've learned that students learn best when they focus on what they know about the material and lean into their group for support throughout the session. I've also come to learn that I learn as much from my students as they do from each other. My time as a PLTL leader has been incredibly fulfilling and I can't wait to continue to have more of these experiences in future semesters.

Julia Hong



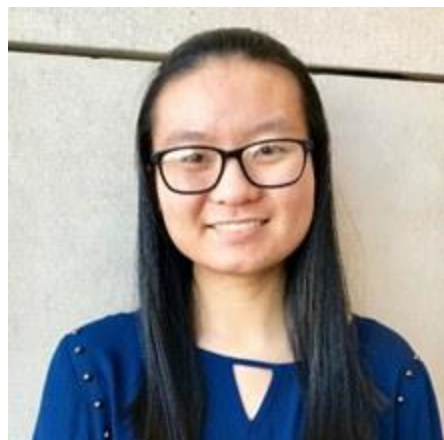
Majors: Biology and Anthropology

Hello! My name is Julia Hong, and I'm double majoring in biology and anthropology.

I embraced the peer leader position after experiencing how effective collaborative learning worked in the PLTL program. Unlike experiences in group work where one person carries the team, the PLTL philosophy encourages all students to take an active role in problem-solving, no matter how small a step they take. I've always loved watching students—who were once strangers—come together, share "aha" moments, and build their way through difficult problems in each session.

While I am a facilitator, my interactions with peers have also revealed that I am also a lifelong learner. Peer leading has let me continue to gain new perspectives on learned topics and bring out the best of unique groups every semester. The seminar in academic mentoring course (a.k.a. SAM) was especially helpful to me as a new PLTL leader in managing contrasting student personalities. As described in one of our SAM books, a summary of lessons for the next generation of peer leaders, PLTL is like cooking—a challenge that embraces various approaches and changes to achieve a product that can be enjoyed by everyone.

Joanna Li



Majors: Spanish and Anthropology: Global Health and Environment

What drew me to becoming a Peer Leader was the collaborative environment that PLTL offers students, with each session being tailored towards each student's needs and welcoming each student to voice their own concerns regarding course material or academic life. Additionally, the SAM course offered me an invaluable opportunity to learn from my fellow peer leaders and co-develop my skills using the leaders' experiences on a weekly basis in their sessions. Most importantly, I was drawn to PLTL because of how it encourages struggle. In the team-driven, supportive environment, students are prompted to problem-solve challenging questions with their peers to develop critical-reasoning skills, justify their thinking, and grow in their confidence to tackle novel ideas. As a Peer Leader, I love encouraging students to investigate concept relationships and building connections, emphasizing a rich understanding of course content.

I've grown in my ability to navigate group problem-solving mistakes, encourage student engagement with peers, and practice the growth mindset to foster student excitement towards the course material. Ultimately, the role of a Peer Leader is to guide their students to grow as thinkers and learners, and it is through the abilities to embrace collaboration, problem-solving strategies, and resilience that allow Peer Leaders to facilitate personal growth in each student.

Amy Kwan



Major: Biology

When I took General Chemistry at Washington University, I was a stressed, nervous freshman who feared science. I convinced myself I was bad at math, and that General Chemistry was a hurdle I just had to get past. As I progressed through the semester, I met a large support network of professors, Teaching Assistants, academic mentors, and Peer Leaders. They made my classroom experience more than just tests and problems, but an experience to learn about myself and how to critically analyze complex problems. As I finished that first semester, I knew I wanted to be a part of a supportive, growth-oriented academic community as a Peer Leader.

As a Peer Leader, I have learned how to connect and engage with my students. While Chemistry is not always their class of choice, PLTL was still a positive experience that added more than just acid/base practice, and a place to meet with peers and learn how to work together. I am so grateful to work with these students and engage with their stories and experiences. My time in SAMbetter helped me work with students of all backgrounds, where I learned how to detect burnout and identify microaggressions. Every student has their own background, and this training allowed me to be more aware of their identities, so I can break down any barriers that may hinder their success. As a graduating senior, PLTL has been one of the most meaningful experiences that have granted me valuable skills I will take into my future career.

Shubhanjali Minhas



Major: Chemistry

I have been peer leading for the past year as a sophomore. Throughout my first year in college, I realized that my experience as part of a peer-led group was pivotal in my understanding and comfort in a new, rigorous academic environment. Being inspired by the support I felt through the Peer Led Team Learning Program (PLTL) for General Chemistry, I decided to apply for the Peer Leader position. I felt that through this opportunity, I would not only be able to facilitate an environment that would help other students grow, but it would also help me develop leadership skills necessary for future roles. I chose to apply for this position as opposed to alternative tutoring positions because of the unique structure of PLTL.

My understanding of what a good facilitator is has changed significantly after engaging with PLTL.

Rather than guiding students through problems as a former student, PLTL encourages group work with peers who are currently taking the class. Students come out of the program not only strengthening their problem-solving strategies and confidence in solving difficult problems, but also strengthening their ability to work with others, a skill that underlies success in all fields. My understanding of what a good facilitator is has changed significantly after engaging with PLTL. I have learned that rather than consistently participating in discussion, a good facilitator is an active listener, jumping in only to seed

discussion among students. Other attributes characteristic of a good facilitator include being able to adjust quickly to different lines of thought and utilizing appropriate facilitation strategies dependent on the nature of certain problems and the group you're working with. These attributes were all honed through the SAM program that supplements the PLTL program. Discussing what strategies would be best for certain problems/group types allows for thorough reflection and understanding of what makes up fruitful communication. This training takes a more humanistic approach and values that all students are capable of success when presented material in a way that appeals to their learning styles. The emphasis of this idea through SAM has supplemented my idea of what diversity in education means and has strengthened my pursuit to facilitate a diverse and inclusive environment.