

# February 2022



PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING  
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

## The Peer Leader

Issue No. 16 Contact: [info@pltlis.org](mailto:info@pltlis.org)

- **Barbara Oakley – Conference Keynote Speaker**
- **Call for Presentations – 10th Annual Conference**
- **PLTL Symposium at BCCE**
- **In Remembrance: Tony West**
- **Profiles: University of Texas, Arlington**

## Message from the President

Dear PLTLIS Community,

Spring is around the corner and with it the Tenth Anniversary of the Society! We will have a special celebration at our 2022 PLTLIS Tenth Annual Conference, *Navigating the Confluence of Academic Disciplines, Leader Training, and Student Learning through the Changing Landscape of PLTL*. The conference will be held both in-person and virtually and your participation will support the practice of Peer-Led Team Learning. Exciting presentations will include the first keynote speaker, Barbara Oakley, who will discuss *Teamwork as Dreamwork: Helping Students (and Instructors) Navigate Social-Emotional Learning in Teams*. See the description of her talk below.

For a symposium on PLTL at BCCE, the deadline for abstracts is **February 28**. This symposium is being organized by practitioners from the University of New Hampshire and the University of South Florida; the latter program was profiled in the *Peer Leader*, Number 15.

We are saddened to note the passing of PLTLIS founding member, Tony West, who with Ellen Goldstein West depicted several aspects of PLTL programs. Several of his works are on display on the PLTLIS website. Tony West also named this newsletter.

And in this issue, read about the PLTL program and some of its practitioners at the University of Texas at Arlington, developed in part by Kimshi Hickman, former President of the PLTLIS Board of Directors.

I encourage you to read this issue and certainly hope for your participation in the upcoming events. If you have questions or would like to participate in any of the ongoing committees, email us at [info@ptlis.org](mailto:info@ptlis.org).

Milka Montes

President, Board of Directors

[www.ptlis.org](http://www.ptlis.org)

## Barbara Oakley – Keynote Presentation

*June 2, 2022 at PLTLIS 10th Annual Conference*

### ***Teamwork as Dreamwork: Helping Students (and Instructors) Navigate Social-Emotional Learning in Teams***

Many social-emotional skills involve both the declarative and procedural learning systems. As it turns out, “intuitive” behavior that we instructors can take for granted must often be explicitly taught. New neural connections—along with the *loss* of neural connections through forgetting—can help students be better learners. Interestingly, faster learners are often less accurate and less flexible in their learning—which means that both fast and slow learners are important on teams. This wide-ranging talk will explore all these ideas, and more!

**Barbara Oakley, PhD, PE** is a Distinguished Professor of Engineering at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan; Michigan’s Distinguished Professor of the Year; and Coursera’s inaugural “Innovation Instructor.” Her work focuses on the complex relationship between neuroscience and social behavior. Dr. Oakley’s research has been described as “revolutionary” in the *Wall Street Journal*. She is a *New York Times* best-selling author who has published in outlets as varied as the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*. *A Mind for Numbers*, her book on effective learning in STEM disciplines, has sold over a million copies worldwide. She co-teaches Coursera’s “Learning How to Learn,” one of the world’s most popular massive open online courses (MOOC) with some four million registered students.



## Call for Presentations, Workshops, Posters, Videos, Panels, and Showcases

***10th Annual Conference - June 1-4, 2022***

***Hosted by Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri***

***In Person and Virtual***

***Submission Deadline: March 30, 2022***

Abstracts from all areas of practice of peer-led learning are welcomed. Submissions are encouraged to be interactive.

- All submissions will be peer-reviewed
- Submissions must be original contributions

For suggested themes for topics and to submit an abstract,

go to: <https://ptlis.org/call-for-papers/>

Questions? Contact Marcelo Sztainberg, [m-sztainberg@neiu.edu](mailto:m-sztainberg@neiu.edu) or

June Gastón, [jgaston@gmcc.cuny.edu](mailto:jgaston@gmcc.cuny.edu), Co-chairs, PTLIS Conference Committee

## Call for Presentations at BCCE

**Deadline: February 28, 2022**

The 2022 Biennial Conference on Chemical Education (BCCE) will be held at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, July 31 – August 4. A symposium on PLTL, *Exploring the implementation of Peer-Led Team Learning and the diverse outcomes that result* invites presentations. The Symposium is described as follows:

Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) is a national initiative to promote active learning in STEM classes through the use of peer leaders, students who have successfully completed a course who return to lead students in small groups. The symposium highlights the diverse set of outcomes that have resulted from enacting PLTL or other forms of peer-supported instruction. Additionally, this symposium invites reports of efforts to initiate or sustain PLTL in the chemistry curriculum, to adapt PLTL to online instruction, and to address diversity and equity issues within peer-supported learning. Given the potential for PLTL to have a substantive impact on the experiences of students, peer leaders and/or faculty members, the symposium welcomes presentations that employ any methodological approach.

For information on the Symposium, contact:

Kathleen Bowe, [kathleen.jeffery@unh.edu](mailto:kathleen.jeffery@unh.edu)

Christopher Bauer, [chris.bauer@unh.edu](mailto:chris.bauer@unh.edu)

Scott E. Lewis, [slewis@usf.edu](mailto:slewis@usf.edu)

For more information on BCCE: <https://www.bcce2022.org/>

## Remembering Tony West

### ***Founding Member of PLTLIS***

Tony West, pictographer, contributed significantly to the development of the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society, providing pictographic views of Peer-Led Team Learning in practice. He was introduced to PLTL by Ellen Goldstein West, served on the Board of Directors from 2012 through 2014, and maintained his interest by suggesting the name for this newsletter, *The Peer Leader*.

Under the tab of *PLTL in Practice* on the website, 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....[SEE MORE](#)

## Campus Profile

***PLTL at the University of Texas, Arlington***

***Division of Student Success***



*1 - Dr. Kimshi Hickman. Assistant Vice Provost for Retention and Completion*



*2 - Catherine Unite. Director, Academic Success Center*



*3 - Monica Franco. PLTL Coordinator, Academic Success Center*

The PLTL Program at the University of Texas at Arlington is managed by the Academic Success Center (ASC), a learning center located within the Division of Student Success. The ASC is a comprehensive office that houses centralized academic support for undergraduate students. ASC services in addition to PLTL include Supplemental Instruction (SI), Drop-In Tutoring, 1:1 Appointment based tutoring, eTutoring, and TRIO Student Support Services tutoring, to name a few. The goal of the Center is to support first- and second-year foundational and gateway courses that have high DFW rates.

The PLTL model was first introduced to UTA in Fall 2020 by Dr. Kimshi Hickman, AVP for Retention and Completion, in an Engineering problem-solving course, as well as in Pre-Calculus. Monica Franco became the new Coordinator I, a position that was created and funded to oversee the PLTL program, under the direction of Catherine Unite, Director of the Academic Success Center. Funding for PLTL is provided through the ACS with tuition allocation funds. The program currently supports Pre-Calculus, Calculus I & II, as well as General Chemistry and Chemistry for Engineers. There are plans for continued growth due to increasing student demand.

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The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) is the largest university in North Texas and second largest in The University of Texas System. UTA is located in the heart of Dallas-Fort Worth and offers more than 180 baccalaureate, masters', and doctoral degree programs with more than 60,000 students engaged in campus or online coursework each year. UTA is recognized as a Tier One institution and designated as an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution) and AANAPISI (Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander Serving Institution) and has an undergraduate population that is 31% Hispanic, 14.9% African American, and 12.8% Asian (2021).

***Shanna Banda. Associate Professor of Instruction and Assistant Department Chair, Department of Mathematics, The University of Texas at Arlington***



*4 - Shanna Banda*

In conjunction with our Division of Student Success (DSS), the Mathematics department implemented PLTL pedagogy in 2020. To support our STEM-intended students, we started with our Preparation for Calculus course. Every semester, we average 7-8 sections of 70 students each in this entry-level course. We partnered with our course coordinator to create the instructional packets and train the leaders. Our initial PLTL sessions were all held online because of the pandemic. While this was not an ideal start of a program, the students loved the interaction, and it helped them not only learn the material at a deeper level but also assisted them with online engagement. PLTL gave our students the opportunity to apply their knowledge, further their skills by discussing more difficult problems, engage in active learning, and explain concepts to each other. I knew this program was going to be successful when students began asking if we would have PLTL for Calculus I. Through DSS support, we added PLTL to Calculus I the following semester and then subsequently added the pedagogy to Calculus II. With each addition, we engaged the respective course coordinator and all faculty teaching the courses. PLTL has now been employed by over 20 instructors and is available to over 1,500 math students every semester.

It has also been exciting to interact with the Peer Leaders. As the Assistant Department Chair, I oversee teaching, technology, and student success initiatives. The Peer Leaders are an essential resource to our students and instructors. With class sizes of 70+, it is difficult to reach each student individually and answer all questions. Through PLTL, students can ask their Peer Leaders questions at any time in the

session, and the Peer Leaders are trained to guide students through the content by asking students thought-provoking questions. The interactions and student development are fun to watch. Additionally, the Peer Leaders report student struggle points to the course coordinator, who provides this insightful information to the course instructors. We can then tailor the next week's lessons to address student difficulties. This symbiotic relationship between Peer Leaders and instructors creates a cohesive and powerful learning environment for our students. As an added benefit, the Peer Leaders further their mathematics and professional skills. Overall, enacting PLTL in our Calculus courses has proven to be a rewarding experience full of meaningful interactions between students and Peer Leaders, and we hope to expand the program into our upper-division mathematics courses.

***Joshua Crowell***



*5 - Joshua Crowell*

**Associate Professor of Practice, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, The University of Texas at Arlington**

The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry implemented PLTL in semester one of our freshman chemistry courses. While we have many programs and materials that are adapted to meet the variety of needs that our first-year students might require, PLTL sessions offer the structure and stability that many students need during a major transition in their life. During the first semester of General Chemistry, students meet with their Peer Leader and peer group once a week in-person for the duration of the semester.

For this platform to work correctly, UTA has put a phenomenal support staff in place. Our leaders are taught how to facilitate group learning in a small group of eight, where they do activities as simple as summarizing textbook material to playing electron configuration Battleship and Stoichiometry Jeopardy! When students, in these small groups, struggle with concepts from lecture or the text, the Peer Leaders have the ability to transfer that information to the general chemistry instructors, who can start to address deficiencies before assessment, rather than after an exam. Since our general chemistry courses typically have enrollment numbers exceeding 200, it is very challenging to address every individual question from students. PLTL gives these students the chance they need to interact with someone who can answer their questions in a personal atmosphere alongside their peers who usually have the same questions.

***Sylvine Ngamije Ineza***



6 - Sylvine Ngamije Ineza

**Peer Leader, CHEM 1465, University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)**

I am a PLTL leader for Chemistry for Engineers (CHEM 1465). I have been in the program since Fall 2021, and to this day, I can affirm that it is a rewarding experience. Personally, I learned to love chemistry after high school because my major (biomedical engineering) heavily relies on it. My experience and testimony made me a good fit to sit in a position where I can lift other students like me. I got to be bold and responsible, overcame public speaking along with my fear of butchering English, and took on the challenge.

I remember one icebreaker we did about “the greatest advice you have ever received” and one student said, “excellence is a choice.” When asked to elaborate, he said that it is a factor that takes hard work and determination, tears, and frustration but is achievable. We agreed to make it our mantra, at least during the sessions. One student demonstrated it during a session when he was convinced that the chapter we were on was very hard for him, but when asked to put his answer on the board for us to compare, his turned out to be the only right answer. I saw him cry tears of joy and felt really happy. It is those tears of joy, the friendships, and the laughs to help master the content by using humor, that make PLTL rewarding.

I believe in this program because it offered me an opportunity to give back to the community that helped me become the person I am today. I am influential and a valuable resource to fellow students. Contributing to someone’s smile is a very fulfilling experience. I get to do that every day here, plus seeing them excel makes me smile too.

***Suhail Safder***



7 - Suhail Safder

**Peer Leader, ENGR-1250 and MATH-1421, University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)**



I find PLTL a wonderful opportunity to enhance students' lives. I peer-led Engineering-1250 (Thinking Like an Engineer) in Fall 2020. It was a course which uses MATLAB coding to solve physics problems. This course involves programming, advanced mathematics, and logical reasoning in physics. Although I had previously doubted if I had chosen the right field, I enjoyed facilitating the sessions because, beyond the scholastic part, this was the one course that made me realize engineering was a good fit for me. I believe other students also feel the same during the initial years of college and it makes me immensely happy to help those who struggle to find their way. I realized I don't have to be the 4.0 GPA, super active and optimistic, but be a real person with a real story to share.

PLTL gave me a newer perspective about the students attending UTA. I had the chance to interact closely with students with differences. I always thought I was going to the university only for academic reasons; however, I have learned life lessons from the PLTL experience. I genuinely believe selflessness is what makes this role perfect because, as a leader, I will be helping others to find their way while still fixing my own life. The best part is staying connected to the goal of supporting students and realizing the positive impact a helping hand can have on someone's development. I have never felt this role as "a job" but rather I found this as my duty to be there. PLTL has given me valuable mentors, lasting friends, and a platform to improve myself. I am sure I will get back more than I expect out of PLTL.

### ***Austin Warren***



*8 - Austin Warren*

### **Peer Leader, Calculus 1, University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)**

I have been a Peer Leader for four semesters, and it has been the most rewarding job I have done so far. I led two groups in Calculus 1 in the Spring 2021 semester. The role of Peer Leader has taught me how to share the learning I have with fellow students and provides a more enriching aspect to my education. I took on the role as a sophomore because I saw it as an opportunity to help others through my efforts. When a professor in one of my introductory engineering classes made me aware of the program, I immediately applied for the position. It has been a rollercoaster from online at the start of the covid pandemic to transitioning to in-person in the Spring 2021. It was a fun ride nonetheless, that has taught me how to be flexible and adapt to different work environments.

The Peer-Led Team Learning program has been a great addition to my university. I have seen firsthand how the sessions help students take what sometimes seemed random math problems and conquer

those advanced techniques with a more thorough understanding after having worked them. Facilitating PLTL sessions is unlike tutoring because rather than just shown solutions, it puts more emphasis on the students to discover the solutions while being guided by their Peer Leader.

I strive in my sessions to create a welcoming environment that promotes excellence because I believe in the PLTL model. I am grateful for the opportunity to work as a Peer Leader, and I look forward to more great experiences.

## Connect on Social Media!



PLTLIS is proud to connect past and present Peer Leaders. We hope to highlight the achievements of Peer Leader alumni while also helping current Peer Leaders exchange experiences and strategies with each other. We are now on Instagram and Facebook. For more information, and to catch the first few posts, follow us!

**Instagram: @pl\_tl\_is**

**Facebook: Peer-Led Team Learning Society**