

# The Peer Leader



## PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

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Issue No. 17

**Issue No. 17** Contact: [info@pltlis.org](mailto:info@pltlis.org)

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### Message from the President

Dear PLTLIS Community,

As we teach others and facilitate learning, we expand our own understanding of the world around us. After uncertain times, we are now springing into the future with a reinvigorated vision of what PLTLIS can do for the community of learning, and ready to celebrate Ten Years of the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society.

We are excited that our Annual Conference will be held at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, from Wednesday, June 1 to Saturday, June 4, 2022. Keynote speakers include David Arendale, profiled below, and Barbara Oakley (<https://pltlis.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Flyer-Keynote-June-2-2022-1-Oakley.pdf>). We have been busy planning this hybrid event where you will have plenty of opportunities to share high impact learning practices with the PLTLIS community. Submission for abstracts is open and the deadline has been extended to April 22nd!

In this issue, watch the recording of Florida International University's PLTL program directors presenting at a conference in London, England, and read about the PLTL program and some of their Peer Leaders at the University of Northern British Columbia, in Canada.

It is exciting to share with you the evidence of interest and practice of PLTL beyond the United States. 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).

See you in Saint Louis!

Milka Montes

President, Board of Directors

[WWW.PLT LIS.ORG](http://WWW.PLT LIS.ORG)

## David Arendale – Keynote Presentation

*June 3, 2022 at PLTLIS 10th Annual Conference*

### Developing a Sense of Belonging Among Group Members

While today's students are the most connected generation through social media, their feelings of aloneness have never been higher. Online learning has increased a sense of loneliness of students who crave real community. Overt and subtle forms of racism impede success for historically-underrepresented students. Small learning groups and their leaders have a unique opportunity to be on the frontlines of engagement by creating an inclusive learning environment so that all have a sense of belonging. Principles shared during this talk can also be applied to the classroom by faculty members as well.



**David Arendale, Ph.D.**, is an Associate Professor Emeritus in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (UMN) and Co-convenor of Colleagues of Color for Social Justice. At UMN, he led a team that developed the Peer Assisted Learning program for courses throughout the curriculum. Arendale investigates the history and best practices of peer assisted learning groups, equity programs, learning assistance, and academic interventions supporting improved student achievement and persistence. At the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Arendale was National Project Director of Supplemental Instruction and guided dissemination and research. The Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations inducted him as a *Founding Fellow* of the profession. Among his publications is *Access at the crossroads: Learning assistance in higher education* (Jossey-Bass). Current research and publications are available at [www.arendale.org](http://www.arendale.org) and his podcasts and social media are at [www.davidmedia.org](http://www.davidmedia.org)

## 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 Extended: April 22, 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://pltlis.org/call-for-papers/>

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

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

## Keynote Address at Queen Mary University London Focuses on PLTL at FIU



Jose Luis Alberte-Dueñas, Director, and Alberto Cruz, Associate Director of the Peer-Led Team Learning program at Florida International University, in Miami, Florida, gave a keynote address on the evolution of the PLTL program from 2002 to 2022. Audience members attending the Queen Mary Festival of Education found the presentation engaging to the point that questions continued beyond the Question and Answer period, and a third of the audience stayed on for an hour of "networking" after the talk. The moderator, Tony Michael, Deputy Vice-Principal for Education (Programmes), Dean for Education (Science & Engineering), and Professor of Reproductive Biology at QMUL, reported that the questions that were not accommodated from the Keynote were discussed further, and new points arose in a very animated discussion. He commented that the presenters' energy and enthusiasm were infectious.

Both presenters are founders and current Board Directors of the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society. To view the keynote address:

[https://media.qmplus.qmul.ac.uk/media/2022+Festival+of+EducationA+Peer+Led+Team+Learning+%28PLTL%29+Key+note/1\\_szmvcso1](https://media.qmplus.qmul.ac.uk/media/2022+Festival+of+EducationA+Peer+Led+Team+Learning+%28PLTL%29+Key+note/1_szmvcso1)

## Campus Profile

***PLTL at the University of Northern British Columbia, Canada***



The University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) is situated in the heart of British Columbia's northern interior, where we are very fortunate to have our Prince George campus located on the unceded traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nations People. Here at UNBC, we offer PLTL as a voluntary support for students enrolled in Introductory Biology II, BIOL 104. This lecture-based course, taught during the winter semester, surveys living organisms, plants, animal form and function, and ecology and population biology. The high volume of content means that students are often in need of supplementary support to help them keep up with the material. Our program, funded by UNBC's Biology Department, consists of 8-10 dedicated peer leaders who support approximately 50% of students enrolled in BIOL 104. Jean Bowen, Learning Specialist - Science and Math, Academic Success Centre at UNBC, plays a huge role in training our leaders and offers additional support throughout the semester so that peer leaders feel confident in their roles.

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*Each year, the feedback from students is overwhelming.*

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Leaders hold sessions for 1.5 hours each week during which time they facilitate activities designed to engage students in a more active style of learning. These sessions are a place for collaboration and teamwork where students not only gain a better understanding of course material and multi-discipline study strategies, but also make lasting friendships. Each year, the feedback from students is overwhelming. They express gratitude to their leaders for their dedication and enthusiasm. Many students say it's the best part of their semester and helped them to ease the transition into post-secondary education.

We are very fortunate to have faculty members at UNBC who have pioneered a program that allows students to take ownership of their learning, not only for themselves, but for the students who will come after them. The transition is very organic: students enroll in PLTL their first year, then, those who demonstrate a higher understanding of the content and exceptional leadership skills, have the opportunity to become leaders themselves. This allows them to share their experiences and give back to the program. The faculty's passion and commitment to improving student learning has been instrumental in the success of PLTL at our school.

## Sydney Botham



4th Year BSc Biology Major

Program Coordinator/Peer Leader, Introductory Biology, University of Northern British Columbia

Becoming a Peer Leader was so much more than a job for me. It opened my eyes to opportunities I never knew were available and helped set me on my career path.

When I was a first-year student at UNBC, I joined PLTL as a way to make friends within my program, and to gain a better understanding of course material. PLTL was such a positive experience for me that I knew if I was ever given the chance, I wanted to create that same environment for other students. I was first asked to become a Peer Leader in January 2020 during my second year of study at UNBC. Though it did seem daunting at first, I was blown away by the support and resources available to me within UNBC's PLTL Program. Before even beginning, I was trained in many facilitation and communication strategies that would not only aid me in this job but help me in other aspects of my life too. For me, PLTL became the best part of my week. During times of stress, I always looked forward to meeting and connecting with my students. This experience is what ignited my love of teaching and set me on a path to make it my future career.

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*Becoming a Peer Leader was so much more than a job for me.*

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During my three years as a Peer Leader, I have been responsible for a group of 10-15 students and would facilitate an hour and a half of activities relating to course material each week. I strive to make activities as fun and inclusive as possible to help students engage in a more active and collaborative style of learning. This job is unlike any other as it has allowed me the opportunity to connect with other students as a peer and foster an atmosphere of psychological safety where students can feel confident taking risks and growing. The most rewarding part of PLTL is seeing the students form meaningful connections with peers and becoming more confident in themselves. This confidence stems not only from their understanding of the course material, but also from the transferrable skills such as public speaking and group collaboration that extend far beyond the scope of first year biology.

This year, I had the unique opportunity to grow further in my Peer Leader role. Dr. Saphida Migabo and Dr. Roy Rea who normally run UNBC's PLTL Program were going on sabbatical and approached me about assuming the role of Program Coordinator. I knew this was my opportunity to further give back to the program that had given so much to me and agreed without hesitation. My time in this role has given me a whole new appreciation for the PLTL Program. Not only have I continued to be a Peer Leader, but I have also gotten the opportunity to further my leadership skills by fostering the development of other peer leaders, facilitating training sessions, and supporting students in their academic journeys. Words cannot describe how grateful I am to be part of such an incredible program that has not only changed the lives of students at UNBC but has also changed mine.

## Mackenzie McLean



**4th Year BSc Forest Ecology Major, Earth Science Minor**

**Peer Leader, Introductory Biology, University of Northern British Columbia**

My introduction to PLTL was as a student in Introductory Biology, in my first semester at UNBC. Participating in the program not only allowed me to succeed in the course work, but taught me how to learn, a skill that I have carried with me throughout my university education.

As a Peer Leader, I hope to create a similar environment for other students. For three years I have been leading sessions weekly, providing a variety of activities tailored to encourage a more hands-on learning experience. One of my favourite aspects of being a Leader is the collaborative learning environment. Even when delivering sessions online, throughout the course of a semester, students who were mostly strangers develop into a team with each member contributing a unique skillset, helping each other learn.

I also reflect fondly on the relationships I have with the other Peer Leaders. We work together to support and encourage one another, and in a way, it feels a bit like family. When we meet weekly, we brainstorm activity ideas, which always involves creative problem solving to translate between in person and online delivery formats. As a more experienced leader, I like sharing my past experiences with newer leaders, and am always open to the new leader's fresh perspectives on the content.

Overall, PLTL has made me a better student, but has also made me more confident and comfortable. I get immense satisfaction when a student finally understands a concept. My involvement in the program has been very rewarding, and an opportunity that I feel privileged to have had.

## Angus Brochez



### **3rd Year BSC Fish and Wildlife Major**

#### **Peer Leader, Introductory Biology, University of Northern British Columbia**

When I was in my first year of university, I remember feeling the pressure of my courses, as well as feeling alone since I didn't know any of my classmates very well. PLTL helped me in many ways to improve my GPA (grade point average), but also to meet some of my classmates. I remember being pleasantly surprised when I went to my first PLTL session; having not expected such a welcoming and relaxed study environment. One of my favourite parts of PLTL was that it made studying an enjoyable activity that I looked forward to every week.

PLTL fundamentally approaches teaching complicated course work by rejecting the linear style of most lecture halls and replacing it with more diverse and dynamic teaching strategies. Sessions are organized and facilitated by leaders for around 10-15 students that encourage active engagement and participation. Communication and collaboration between students and the leader are key aspects of the success of any PLTL session.

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*Something that surprised me about being a PLTL leader was just how much I enjoyed it.*

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I was incredibly nervous when I was asked to become a PLTL leader, but I knew that I had to accept, and I am so happy that I did. Working in PLTL has allowed me to grow as a student and leader. Having to



teach others about study strategies and trying to design activities around complicated subject matter has expanded my understanding of what it means to learn. I understand more now than ever before how important it is to not just re-read your notes on course content but to instead interact with and make connections with it. I have also improved as a leader- not just with my facilitating, but with my communication and decipherment abilities. PLTL training and my experiences working as a leader have equipped me with unique skills to better understand the needs of my students, and how best to help them.

Something that surprised me about being a PLTL leader was just how much I enjoyed it. It's more than just simply telling students to complete activities. I love when I design a task that encourages friendly competition or creative expression and seeing students take to them. It's such a great feeling when you take studying dense subject matter, such as cell biology, and turn it into a game. It may sound naive, but when you associate sophisticated content with a goofy activity or a silly drawing, chances are you'll retain it in more detail and with more ease.

I am so happy that I decided to work as a PLTL leader, it has expanded my understanding of what it means to be a leader and how to be a good student as well. I feel thankful for the experiences I have gained from working as a PLTL leader and would encourage all students to try PLTL if given the opportunity.

### [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](#)

### [Contribute to the Peer Leader!](#)

Do you want to share news with the PLTL community? Send news items, story suggestions, and updates from your campus Peer-Led Team Learning program to [info@pltlis.org](mailto:info@pltlis.org).