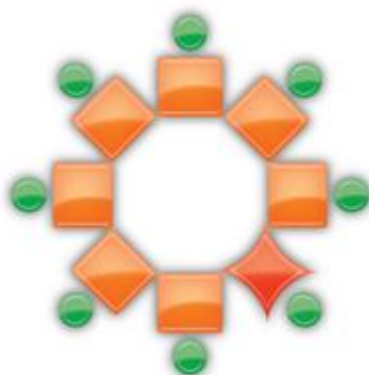


December 2023



PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

The Peer Leader

Issue No. 30 Contact: newsletter@pltlis.org

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Message from the President



Dear members of the PLTLIS community,

I hope this message finds you in good health and high spirits. As we approach the remainder of the Holiday season, I wanted to take a few moments to update you on some exciting developments for our PLTLIS community.

First, our conference committee is working hard on our upcoming conference May 29 – June 1, 2024, in Rochester New York, hosted by the University of Rochester. You will find our conference contains a diverse program featuring keynote speakers, panel discussions, and interactive workshops that will delve into the latest trends, innovations, and challenges in our field. There will be something for everyone – faculty, staff, peer leaders and PLTL alumni.

I encourage each of you to **actively** participate, whether as presenters, panelists, or engaged attendees. Our collective knowledge and expertise are what make our community truly exceptional, and this conference is an excellent opportunity to further strengthen our bonds and contribute to the advancement of PLTL. Prepare to submit abstracts and plan your travel – the website information will be available by mid-December!

We have working groups doing strategic planning, reviewing our website, publishing our APLL journal, planning the conference and more. Your active participation is not only welcomed but crucial to our success.

It is exciting to learn of the work being accomplished with Peer-Led Team Learning with sizing that fits all. PLTL is being facilitated in groups ranging from four to 24 students depending on the practical aspects of programs, in courses and lab environments. Institutions are finding their ideal size depending on the specific context, course content, and the goals of the PLTL program. It's important to strike a balance that allows for effective collaboration, meaningful discussions, and active participation by all students. We would love to learn how ongoing assessment and feedback is helping you to fine-tune group sizes based on the specific needs and dynamics of the learning environment.

On behalf of the PLTLIS Board, I want to express my deepest gratitude for your continued support and dedication. May this holiday season bring you joy, warmth, and the opportunity to recharge and spend quality time with your loved ones. Looking ahead to the new year, I am eager to witness the contributions each of you will make to our field.

Warm regards,

Kimshi Hickman, Ed.D.

PLTLIS President, Board of Directors

WWW.PLTLLIS.ORG

2024 Conference Theme:

PLTL IS: Inclusive, Engaging, and Meaningful Learning

Keynote Presentation: Sarah Rose Cavanagh

ENERGIZING PEER LEADING AND LEARNING

WITH COMPASSIONATE CHALLENGE

When people are asked to tell a story about their favorite teacher in their educational journey, they nearly always describe an instructor or coach who was warm, funny, empathetic.... but who also challenged them to rise to high expectations of effort and success. We know from motivation research that the best goals are those that are specific and difficult, as setting a low bar for oneself can be

energizing rather than energizing. How can we create learning environments that encourage students to set challenging goals for themselves, that mobilize energy and stimulate creativity, while also being compassionate and flexible regarding the many difficulties students face? In this interactive keynote, Sarah Rose Cavanagh will present research and food for thought based on her most recent book on creating learning environments of compassionate challenge, ending on practical tips for teaching self-determined seekers of knowledge.



1 - SARAH ROSE CAVANAUGH

SARAH ROSE CAVANAUGH is the Senior Associate Director for Teaching and Learning in the Center for Faculty Excellence at Simmons University (Boston, Massachusetts), where she also teaches in the Psychology Department as an Associate Professor of Practice. Before joining Simmons, she was an Associate Professor of psychology and neuroscience (tenured) at Assumption University (Massachusetts), where she also served in the D'Amour Center for Teaching Excellence as Associate Director for Grants and Research. Sarah's research considers the interplay of emotions, motivation, learning, and quality of life. Her most recent research project, funded by the National Science Foundation, convenes a network of scholars to develop teaching practices aimed at greater effectiveness and equity in undergraduate biology education. She is author of four books, including *The Spark of Learning: Energizing the College Classroom with the Science of Emotion* (2016) and upcoming *Mind Over Monsters: Supporting Youth Mental Health with Compassionate Challenge* (2023). She gives keynote addresses and workshops at a variety of colleges and regional conferences, blogs for *Psychology Today*, and writes essays for venues like Literary Hub and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. She's also on BlueSky too much, at @SaRoseCav.

Plan now to bring a team to the PLTLIS Twelfth Annual Conference!

University of Rochester, Rochester, New York

Wednesday – Saturday, May 29-June 1, 2024

PLTL IS: Inclusive, Engaging, and Meaningful Learning

For more about the Twelfth Annual Conference, go to www.pltlis.org/conference

HANDS ACROSS THE WATER

Report from Tony Michael (QMUL)

On Friday 10 November, two members of the PLTLIS Board of Directors were fortunate enough to meet up in London (England - not Ontario!). Catherine Unite, from the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) visited Tony Michael and colleagues at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) where they discussed the adaptation of PLTL to work in the UK Higher Education (HE) system. (For anyone interested in those differences, you might like to read the article entitled "Born in the USA" in Issue 2 of the PLTLIS journal - *Advances in Peer Led Learning*, available [here](#)).



In trying to enhance education and the student experience at QMUL, there are a range of projects and initiatives aimed at achieving excellence in education, in student engagement, in student employability, and in the learning environment. Originally conceived as an education project when Tony and Redwan (*pictured below*) visited Florida International University (FIU) to learn more about PLTL, this specific form

of peer-led learning also serves to strengthen student engagement and student employability. In discussion, it became clear that, on both sides of the Atlantic, the skills developed through PLTL (particularly among Peer Leaders) are highly valued and sought after by employers of graduates.

The Principal's Suite at QMUL:

From L to R – Lesley Howell, Catherine Unite, Tony Michael, and Redwan Shahid

During her visit, Catherine also met with Lesley Howell (academic lead for PLTL in Chemistry and Pharmaceutical Chemistry), as well as meeting one of the senior Peer Leaders, specifically in Biology, Hannah Wilton (currently in her final year of a Medical Genetics degree). Sadly, Catherine was unable to meet with Sally Faulkner, academic lead for PLTL in Biology; as Catherine was on route from South Africa to London, Sally was flying out from London to Cape Town!



The Queens' Building at QMUL: From L to R – Lesley Howell, Tony Michael, Catherine Unite, and Hannah Wilton

After an informal Persian lunch with Tony, Lesley and Hannah in Mile End, Catherine ended her time on campus by meeting with Stefan Krummaker. Like Tony, Stefan is a Deputy Vice-Principal for Education and a member of the PLTL Advisory Board which oversees the development of PLTL across QMUL. As the visit concluded, Tony accompanied Catherine to Whitechapel train station to continue her London adventure.





For reference, Whitechapel was where the infamous Jack the Ripper operated, where the “Elephant Man,” Joseph Merrick, was discovered and treated (in the Royal London Hospital, that now forms part of QMUL), and where the Kray Twins (London’s answer to Al Capone and John Dillinger - if they had been genetically identical) gained their notoriety in the 1960’s. (If you’re unfamiliar with the Krays, and the relevance of The Blind Beggar pub, *picture here*, you might like to check out Tom Hardy’s portrayal of both Ronnie and Reggie Kray in the film *Legend* on Netflix – rated 18 for language and violence). So in addition to learning how we have adapted PLTL to fit into a different Education system on the other side of the Atlantic, Catherine also got a taste of the gritty character of the East End of London. (Hope that we didn’t dissuade her from returning back to QMUL in the near future!)

What Is An Optimum Group Size for PASS/PAL Sessions?

How many students do you allocate to a PASS or PAL group? This question, posed by Gerard Clough (Royal Holloway, University of London, England), was posted in August 2023, on a listserv for practitioners (PEERLEARNINGANDSUPPORT@JISCMAIL.AC.UK) and within a couple of days a lively conversation ensued.

PASS (Peer-Assisted Study Session) and PAL (Peer-Assisted Learning) are names given to Supplemental Instruction (SI) programs in countries in Europe and elsewhere. These sessions are supplemental to a course (or “module” in the UK) and attendance is not mandatory. As Gerard Clough notes, “...what works for you given some inevitable drop-off in attendance as the term proceeds? I am after a sweet spot number - not too large for my (paired) PASS Leaders to deal with but not too small (by mid-term) to make the whole thing unsustainable.”

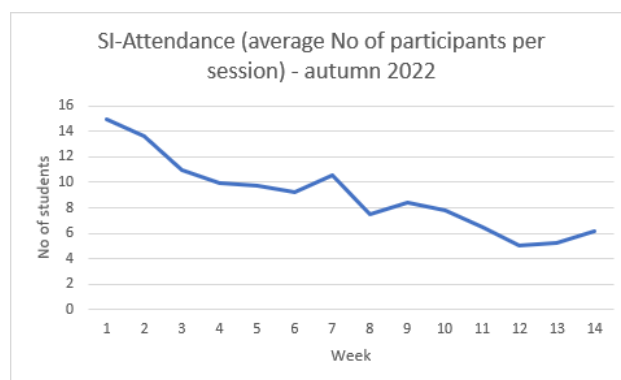
From Trinity College Dublin (Republic of Ireland), Ralph Armstrong-Astley responded: “For most mentoring and peer-led transition programmes, including PAL, the golden ratio seems to be 2:15. It's what I always aim for - although of course it rarely happens!”

We also have our PAL Leaders working in groups of 3 now.

At Manchester Metropolitan University, (Manchester, England) Jac Fossett also noted that each session has two leaders: “MMU used to try timetabling (scheduling) sessions for 2 PAL Leaders with 20 students. This did not work for us, especially as PAL Sessions are optional. You might get 12 attend initially, which soon falls to 7, then 2. So you might end up with 2 PAL Leaders with 2 students for most of the year. These sessions end up being 1to1 support rather than PAL...! Since 2022 we've been inviting all relevant first years to bigger sessions. Some courses can have 700+ students assigned, so we start those PAL Sessions online or break them down into smaller sessions through each week. If you can get 60 students to have fun for the first 2-3 weeks it really helps. We've found that running PAL this way helps engagement from the very start, which boosts attendance overall and we get much better sessions right through both semesters. Once the attendance naturally dies down for our bigger sessions (after 4-5 weeks) we try and move them to one, in person session each week and usually have around 10-30 students in each session. Some keep going with 100+ groups online, and some end up with just 1-2 students each week - but we've found that starting bigger has a much better impact. I definitely don't recommend setting things up for 2-20. We also have our PAL Leaders working in groups of 3 now. I've found this much better for retention, and our sessions are more dynamic, and it's just better overall if a PAL Leader can't make a session because there's not so much pressure for anyone having to work alone.”

Emma Mansfield, at the University of Southampton (England), noted that “...we recommend the golden number for face to face sessions be between 15 and 25. Obviously if we assign closer to 25 we like to think it will maximise attendance. We always tell our Peer Leaders that it's about quality of interactions not quantity.”

Joakim Malm, from Lund University in Sweden, reported their study on optimal numbers in SI-PASS sessions: “We would ideally like our sessions to have between 5-15 students (reasons for this are published - see: Attendance Numbers at SI Sessions and Their Effect on Learning Conditions, *Journal of Peer Learning*: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/ajpl/vol13/iss1/3/> .) An example of how the average session attendance varies over the autumn semester for the engineering faculty at Lund University is shown below. The data comes from approx. 70 sessions held each week. In order to achieve 5-15 students on average over the semester, we usually allot a group of 25-30 students to each leader (our leaders are paid and work alone) considering that the average attendance is about 35 % over the semester. This means we have to prepare our leaders to handle groups that occasionally reach 25 in the first couple of weeks and that attendance can be very low at the end of the semester.”



At the Technological University Dublin (Republic of Ireland), Nevan Bermingham responded that, “We pair PAL leaders together in each PAL session for mutual support and to increase the 1:1 support if

needed (one runs the PAL the other gives 1:1) and we aim for 7 to 10 students per session. We go with a max of 10 where possible, as it allows for better small group interactions and moves the session away from the "teaching PAL" that was happening with larger groups."

After receiving these responses, Gerard Clough wrote: "I can see how smaller groups (10-15) go well with PASS pedagogy and are much less intimidating for PASS Leaders. My difficulty is in deciding what group size to start with in order to achieve an optimum ratio by mid-term (after attendance drop off). Also, because we have a small number of Leaders, starting with a ratio of e.g. 2:15 would mean restricting the PASS offer to about half the incoming first year cohort to the Department piloting PASS. But this is a route we may need to take."

Katie Smith, from the University of York (England), added, "We tend to have 3 PAL leaders per session at Uni of York, and if need be offer the sessions multiple times for bigger departments. This works out at 10-15 students per PAL leader and works well with the rooms we book... The max group size we have is 60 attendees at York due to room capacity. We use that model for bigger departments and they match fund the money for 3 leaders (normally to 5/6 leaders)."

Does anyone have any experience with larger group numbers?

Gabriele Wegner, from the University of Manchester (England), wrote, "We currently work with a ration of 8 to 15 attendees to 2 leaders, however, I am considering to increase this ratio for next academic year due to the inevitable drop out by mid-term which then leaves some groups with very small sizes. Does anyone have any experience with larger group numbers? It has been suggested to me to increase attendee numbers per group as my very small team is responsible for coordinating the PASS (and Peer Mentor) schemes for the whole of the University, ie roughly 10000 new UG students each year. This obviously means we have a huge training commitment for the leaders and the thinking was if the groups were bigger than we needed to train less leaders and it might also insure that the group sizes don't drop to 2 or 3 attendees after the drop out by mid term. So I just wanted to see if someone had experience with larger groups and how that affects the outcomes ie how to ensure it is still PASS and not turning into a teaching environment etc."

Jaden Allan, Northumbria University, in Newcastle, England, reported, "We aim to have 2 facilitators per 25-30 students in the nursing programme, this is for the support of the facilitators as well as the group. As our scheme [program] works on a voluntary basis for facilitators (learning leaders) we can sometimes have more, we then allow the facilitators to organise who will cover what and when. We try to allocate field-specific (adult, child, LD, MH) nursing students to the year below, so group 1 year two, will support group 1 year 1. The first session is built into the programme thus dedicated time, as the year progresses there is a reduction in attendance. This correlates with student assimilation into the programme and the university. Ad hoc sessions occur as key points arise, exams and transition to year 2. In the clinical setting attendance is dependent on geographical location, shift patterns and access."

PLTL Practitioners: What is the average size of your peer-led groups? Are the numbers constant over the course of the semester? What impacts group size in your PLTL program?

Send your comments to newsletter@pltlis.org for publication in an upcoming newsletter!

WRITERS

Contributor	Affiliation	Designation / Role	URL (where available)
Gerard Clough	Royal Holloway University of London (England)	Senior Teaching Fellow	Available here ^[1]
Ralph Armstrong-Astley	Trinity College Dublin (Republic of Ireland)	Student 2 Student Coordinator	Available here ^[2]
Jac Fossett	Manchester Metropolitan University (England)	Student Peer-to-Peer Support Manager	
Emma Mansfield	University of Southampton (England)	PAL Coordinator	
Joakim Malm	Lund University (Sweden)	Programme Director – SI	Available here ^[3]
Nevan Bermingham	Technological University Dublin (Republic of Ireland)	Lecturer (with expertise in PAL and SI)	Available here ^[4]
Katie Smith	University of York (England)	PAL and Inclusive Learning Project Coordinator	Available here
Gabriele Wegner	Manchester University (England)	Student Success and Development Officer	Available here ^[5] Peer Support Blog: https://peersupportmanchester.wordpress.com/ ^[6]
Jaden Allan	Northumbria University, Newcastle (England)	Assistant Professor and Director of Transnational Education (Nursing Midwifery & Health)	Available here ^[7]

2 - [1] <https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/study/academic-skills/cedas/staff-profiles/gerard-clough.aspx> [2] https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/staff/ralpharmstrong-astley.php [3] <https://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/lucat/user/73cdf80e0ded33ab57992cd191c17fbd> [4] <https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/faculties-and-schools/arts-humanities/tourism-and-hospitality-management/people/academic-staff/nevanbermingham.php> [5] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q58O02U9ka0> [6] <https://peersupportmanchester.wordpress.com/> [7] <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/a/jaden-allan/>

Participate on a Committee!

Are you interested in helping to spread the work of Peer-Led Team Learning? The success of the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society is dependent on the continued support of practitioners like yourself. Whether you've known about PLTL for only one or more than twenty years, the PLTLIS Board of Directors invites you to join a committee and impact the growth of PLTLIS. If you would like to be involved and don't see your interest listed here, we have plenty of other ways for you to get involved, and we look forward to inquiries of interest to newsletter@pltlis.org.

Connect on Social Media!

PLTLIS is proud to connect past and present Peer Leaders and all who are interested in Peer-Led Team Learning. What is happening at your campus? What opportunities do you know about where peer leading would be a valuable attribute? *Follow, like, and link* with us on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn:

Instagram: @pl_tl_is

Facebook: Peer-Led Team Learning Society

LinkedIn: Peer-Led Team Learning International 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 newsletter@pltlis.org.