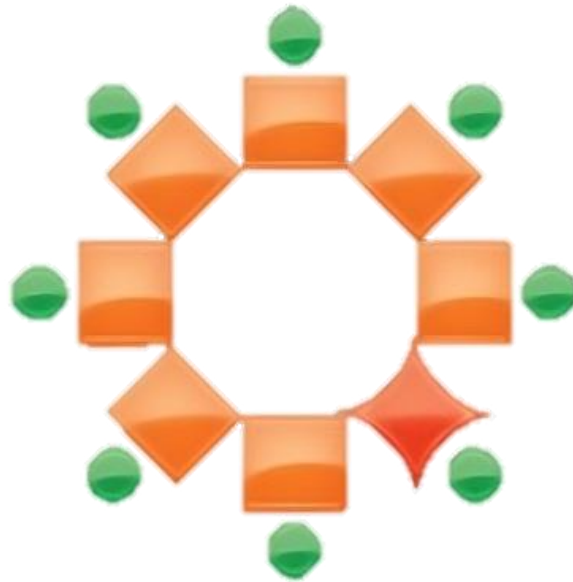


# The Peer Leader April 2025



PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING  
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

**Issue No. 41**    Contact: [info@pltlis.org](mailto:info@pltlis.org)

- Early-Bird Registration Extended to May 5th
- May 28: Workshop: Preparation of Peer Leaders
- May 29: Keynote Speaker on Working in Teams
- May 30: Keynote Panel on AI
- May 31: Keynote Panel on Assessment
- “Birds of a Feather” – Discussion Groups
- UTA’s CLIMB grant: PLTL in Engineering
- Profile: Behind the Newsletter’s Look
- Short Takes

[Message from the PLTLIS President](#)

Dear members of the PLTLIS community,

Next month brings the highlight of the PLTLIS calendar: the society's Annual Conference. Attendees at this year's conference – in-person and online - will discuss the future of peer-led team learning in an increasingly technology-dominated world. As we grapple with the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence alongside other forms of educational technology, understanding the strengths and opportunities for peer-led team learning is very timely.

Given that this year's conference is to be hosted at California State University – Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), I devote this month's presidential message to one of the most famous residents of the state of California, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*: the giant sequoia or redwood. These majestic trees, native to the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada, are recognized as being one of the largest living organisms found anywhere on earth. Individual trees typically grow to between 150 and 300 feet in height, with a trunk circumference of up to 29 feet, and can live for in excess of 3,000 years.



1 - *Sequoiadendron giganteum*

One of the secrets of the biological and ecological success of the giant sequoia is their interconnectedness. Although each tree only has shallow roots, the roots of any one tree grow outward until they touch and then intertwine with the root systems of neighboring trees. Hence, while, at first glance, a sequoia forest appears to be a collection of individual trees, all of those trees enjoy rich and strong connections that effectively form one functional “superorganism.” It is that connectedness which allows each sequoia to grow so large and to resist disruptive forces (such as gravity, strong winds or tectonic forces) for more than 30 centuries.

The giant sequoia offers a perfect analogy for PLTLIS. It's through the formation of connections and the exchanging of information between and among individuals and different institutions across the states and countries that we can grow stronger, supporting and enhancing the practice of PLTL across the USA and around the world. So, when you attend next month's

conference (whether in person or online), **make connections** with as many people as you can. You're already united by a love of and commitment to PLTL (or other forms of peer-led learning), so make the most of any opportunity to explore that shared commitment and see what else you have in common with the other conference participants.

Let's learn from the giant sequoia: connectedness is a source of strength that can help to support us as PLTL practitioners and advocates, and that strength through connection becomes even more important in uncertain and challenging times.

Sending every best wish, as always,

*Tony*

**Prof. Tony Michael**

PLTLIS President, Board of Directors

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

*2025 PLTLIS Conference (May 28th - May 31st)*

*Early Bird Registration Rates Available until Monday, May 5th*

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<https://pltlis.org/2025-pltlis-conference-registration/>

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In-Person registration fees include breakfast, lunch, and breaks

### **Opportunities and Challenges in the Age of Technology-Enhanced Education**

The theme for the 2025 PLTLIS Conference will explore the transformative impact of technology on peer-led learning and education. What is the intersection of technology and human-centered educational practices? How can peer-led sessions foster engagement, camaraderie and learning when technology is so seductive? How can technology affect higher education practices when retention and student involvement are under duress?



 **Hosted by California State University Dominguez Hills**

*Carson, California (Los Angeles)*

 **Dates:**

**Wednesday – Saturday, May 28–31, 2025**

*In-Person or Virtual: Hybrid Format*

 **Bring a Team to the PLTLIS Annual Conference!**

We are looking forward to your participation, either online or in person!

### *Wednesday, May 28 – Pre-Conference Workshop*

#### **Preparing Peer Leaders to Facilitate Small Groups**

This workshop is intended for faculty, administrators, learning specialists, and student leaders.

The workshop is a compressed session that addresses selected experiential techniques and practices as the basis for a formal course that recognizes the interaction between and among the students in a learning group facilitated and led by a Peer Leader.

Participants will also examine how to develop a curriculum proposal for a credit-bearing course to be adopted at their campus.

Participants are encouraged to bring a team: faculty, learning specialists, administrators, staff, and student leaders, to participate in this workshop, in-person or virtually.

Participants will:

- experience sample activities and assignments that can be incorporated in a peer leader preparation course
- discuss learning theories relevant to peer leader preparation
- examine examples of end-of-semester peer leader course artifacts
- work collaboratively to draft a course description proposal for peer leader preparation.

Facilitation of small groups is leadership development and is learned through experience based in learning theory, practice and reflection. The materials presented are part of a one-credit course developed and tested over 15 years, and comprise units for a *Handbook for Facilitators*, an upcoming workbook published by PLTLIS Press.

Presenters are practitioners from PLTL programs.

### *Thursday, May 29 - Keynote Presentation*

#### **Harnessing Collective Intelligence and Managing Conflict on Your Team**

Good teams are those that cultivate collective intelligence—the ability to coordinate and leverage the unique strengths, skills, and perspectives of their members—to achieve a complex goal. Achieving high collective intelligence requires team members to build on each member’s contributions. It also depends on individuals who can address disagreements and obstacles productively, turning challenges into opportunities for growth. This interactive presentation will describe planning strategies that Peer Leaders and others can use to lay the groundwork for collective intelligence. Next, the presentation will model how to productively respond to team challenges, turning these into opportunities that can further improve the team. Participants will have an opportunity to reflect on their conflict styles and practice productively responding to a range of obstacles.

#### **Running Team Meetings That Cultivate Psychological Safety**

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*Workshop Facilitated by Joanna Wolfe – May 29*

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Psychological safety is the belief that individuals can openly share ideas, ask questions, and admit mistakes without fear of negative repercussions. Teams with high psychological safety consistently demonstrate greater morale, collaboration, and productivity.

In this session, we will explore strategies for leaders to foster psychological safety within their teams. Participants will engage in role-playing activities to practice active listening and learn techniques for analyzing mistakes in ways that avoid defensiveness. Additionally, we will discuss methods for measuring psychological safety and review practical tools for structuring conversations that encourage open and honest communication.

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### *About the Facilitator — Joanna Wolfe*

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**Joanna Wolfe** is Teaching Professor of English and Affiliated Faculty in Mechanical Engineering at Carnegie Mellon University, where she designs communication and professional development courses for undergraduate and graduate students. The first edition of her textbook, *Team Writing: A Guide to Working in Groups*, has sold over 28,000 copies. A second edition of her textbook, [\*Team Writing\*](#), coauthored with Christopher Lam, was published along with [\*Equity & Communication\*](#) in 2025 as part of the new *Bedford series in Technical and Professional Communication*. Her research on teamwork and collaboration has received funding from the National Science Foundation and received awards from the American Society of Engineering Education, the National Council for Teachers of English and the IEEE Professional Communication Society.



### *Friday, May 30 - Keynote Panel*

#### **Opportunities and Challenges in the Age of Technology-Enhanced Education**

**PART I:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly changing our world. Technologies driven by AI influence our personal and professional lives, and they are transforming how courses are taught and how students learn. Moderated by Dr. Ann Gates, the panelists will describe how AI can be used to personalize learning, enhance understanding and analysis of complex data, and support management of courses, knowledge, and peer learning. In addition, they will touch on the

impact of AI on the workforce, including ensuring that graduates have competencies on the responsible and ethical use of AI.

**PART II:** This interactive session is structured as a gallery walk that allows attendees to move from station to station to meet with each panelist from Part I, ask questions, and share your own approaches in integrating AI into the classroom.

**Ann Quiroz Gates, Moderator,** is Senior Advisor to the Provost for Strategic STEM Initiatives and the past Senior Vice Provost of Faculty Affairs at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), where she holds the AT&T Distinguished Professorship. She is the Executive Director of the Computing Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (CAHSI), a nationally recognized network focused on the recruitment, retention, and advancement of Hispanics in computing.



*2 - Ann Quiroz Gates*



*3 - Ethan Debnath*

**Ethan Debnath** is a computer science senior at UT Arlington who co-founded *Pluto Learning* with Sami Ali. Pluto Learning is an AI-powered study platform designed to improve student success by using AI ethically to form study groups and provide tutoring with 24/7 access. Personalized course guides, and collaboration rooms are all seamlessly integrated into a college's curriculum with broad applicability across departments to address a wide range of institutional goals.



*4 - Samar Gad*



5 - Michael Pope

**Samar Gad** is an Associate Professor at Kingston University London and an education consultant specializing in the intersection of finance, artificial intelligence, and higher education. She has pioneered the integration of AI technologies in financial education, combining personalized data analytics with career coaching to enhance student outcomes and employability.

**Michael Pope** is a philosopher in the Embedded EthiCS program at Harvard University where he collaborates with an interdisciplinary team to integrate ethics education across the CS curriculum. His primary research interests lie at the intersections of epistemology, applied ethics, and philosophy of science. He is especially interested in the nature and normativity of trust and trustworthiness.

## *Saturday, May 31 - Keynote Panel*

### **Assessing Efficacy of Peer-Led Learning**

Panelists will delve into the efficacy of peer-led pedagogical approaches through assessment methods, examining their impact on student success. Moderated by Dr. Mohsen Beheshti, panelists will explore the nuanced dynamics of peer-led teaching, focusing on models like Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) and Supplemental Instruction (SI). Panelists will present data-driven analyses and case studies, evaluating how these strategies foster collaborative learning environments, improve academic performance, and enhance student engagement. We will also discuss the methodologies used to assess the effectiveness of these programs, including metrics for student achievement, peer facilitator training, and overall program sustainability, ultimately aiming to identify best practices for implementing and evaluating peer-supported learning initiatives.

**Mohsen Beheshti, Moderator**, is the Chair and Professor of Computer Science Department at California State University - Dominguez Hills. His research interests include Network Security, Big Data, Multidisciplinary research, and Curriculum Development. He is the director of Center of Excellence in AI, Cybersecurity, and Emerging Technology (CAE2) to promote research and education. He is a founding member of the Computing Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (CAHSI), and the lead for CAHSI INCLUDES West Region.





6 - Mohsen Beheshti

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### *Panelists*

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**Michele Dunbar** is Director of Integrated Learning Assessment and Accreditation, and the Accreditation Liaison Officer at California State University Dominguez Hills. She supports assessment across the Division of Academic Affairs and leads a cross-divisional effort to conduct an integrated assessment of the First- and Second-Year Experiences in partnership with the Student Affairs Assessment Office.

**Ryan Khoo** is Director, Toro Testing and Learning Center at California State University Dominguez Hills. With a background in instructional design, tutoring, and educational leadership, he has contributed to initiatives that strengthen tutoring, supplemental instruction, and student engagement. He values collaboration and data-informed practice as tools to better understand and meet student needs.

**Corey Shanbrom** is a Professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). He earned his PhD in Mathematics at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2013. He has been involved in PLTL since 2013 and currently serves as Director of the Peer Assisted Learning program at CSUS.

**Heather Thiry** is Senior Research Associate at the University of Colorado at Boulder with Ethnography & Evaluation Research. She serves as the external evaluator of the National Science Foundation-funded INCLUDES Alliance, Computing Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (CAHSI), and as principal investigator (PI) of a National Science Foundation-funded research study of STEM transfer.

### *Birds of a Feather...Flock Together!*

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**Contribute Ideas for Discussion by May 14!**

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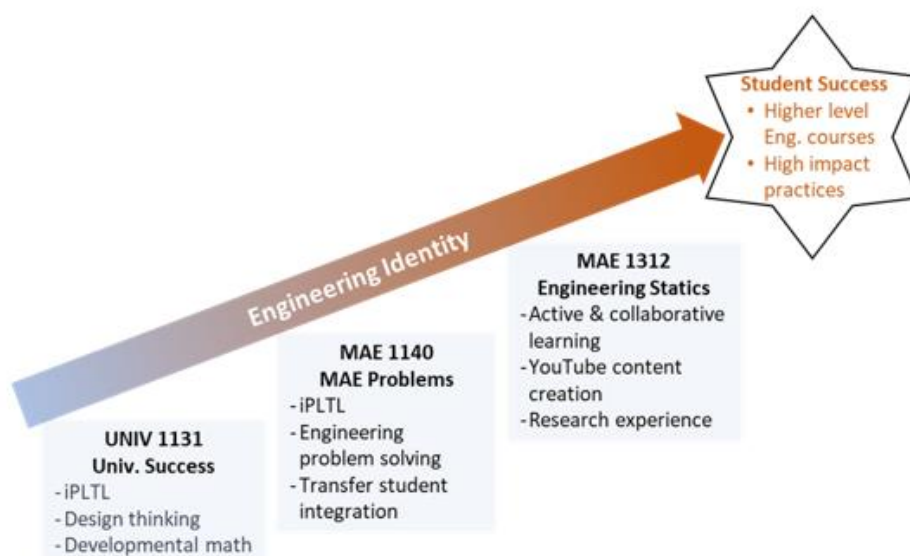
Are you hoping to catalyze discussions on your favorite peer education topic among like-minded colleagues? If so, we want to hear from you! On Thursday May 29, in person and remote conference attendees will have the opportunity to “find their flock” by joining other colleagues interested in the same discussion topic over lunch. The conference committee is seeking your input in identifying topics that you would like to discuss at your physical or virtual table. Please email your ideas to [info@pltlis.org](mailto:info@pltlis.org) by **Wednesday, May 14th**.

### *UTA Secures NSF HSI Grant to Support Engineering Students Through PLTL Collaborative Learning*

The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) has been awarded a prestigious National Science Foundation (NSF) Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) grant to enhance engineering student success through collaborative learning initiatives. This grant, in partnership with UTA’s Academic Success Center (ASC) and the College of Engineering (COE), funds the "Fostering Engineering Identity through Collaborative Learning in Math and Basic (CLIMB) Engineering" project.

The CLIMB initiative incorporates in-class Peer-Led Team Learning (iPLTL) in two foundational freshman courses: UNIV 1131 (University Success) and MAE 1140 (Mechanical Engineering Problem Solving). These courses prepare students for collaborative learning without a peer leader (PL) in a MAE gateway course, MAE1312 Engineering Statics. By integrating design thinking (DT) strategies, students develop problem-solving skills applicable to complex mathematical, engineering, and real-world challenges.

Figure 1 (below) presents an overview of the project. The project implements in-class PLTL (iPLTL) in two freshman courses, namely UNIV1131 University Success and MAE1140 MAE Problem Solving, preparing students for collaborative learning without a peer leader (PL) in a MAE gateway course MAE1312 Engineering Statics. Students in these three courses will learn how to apply design thinking (DT) strategies to solve complex math, engineering, and life problems.



7 - Figure 1

**Figure 1:** Project Overview - Foster Students’ Engineering Identity Through Collaborative Learning and Design Thinking

	Conventional PLTL	In-class PLTL (iPLTL)
Participation rate (%)	Low 25% (UTA target)	100%
Time commitment	Out of class time	In-class time
Schedule constraint	Difficult for students with jobs, etc.	None
PL-faculty interaction	Only faculty liaison interacts with PLs	All instructors interact with PLs
Student-faculty interaction	No faculty-student interaction during PLTL	Faculty interact with students during PLTL

8 - Table 1

**Table 1.** Comparison of PLTL Programs at UTA: “Conventional” vs. In-class Sessions

This initiative stemmed from a proposal by UTA MAE faculty, Dr. Huang, who integrated iPLTL modules into her NSF HSI grant submission. The successful incorporation of PLTL strategies into UNIV 1131 and MAE 1140 has expanded the program’s impact on student learning outcomes.

Recent data from Fall 2024 highlights the effectiveness of PLTL sessions: Students in MAE 1312 who participated in iPLTL sessions earned grades 0.51 points higher than non-participants (2.44 vs. 1.93).

The demonstrated success of this initiative has led to sustained funding for the PLTL program and will provide \$10,000 in funding over three years to the Academic Success Center for training and program development, which started in Spring 2025.

This partnership exemplifies UTA's commitment to innovative learning strategies and underscores a broader effort to expand and secure funding for PLTL programs through collaboration between campus partners and the ASC. As UTA continues to foster an inclusive and supportive engineering education environment, initiatives like CLIMB are vital in shaping the next generation of engineering leaders.

**Catherine Unite, Director of Academic Success Center**

**Monica Franco, PLTL Program Manager**

### *Behind the Newsletter's Look*

—Dailier Ayuso, Program Coordinator of the PLTL Program at Florida International University (FIU), in Miami, Florida, has been instrumental in creating an engaging look to *The Peer Leader*. The newsletter arrives via email and is published using the Sway program which allows dynamism in its presentation. It is later archived on the PLTLIS website in pdf format (which is static). If you sign up to receive the newsletter (see [www.pltlis.org](http://www.pltlis.org) and enter your first and last name and your email address) you will be sent *The Peer Leader* through email.

Dailier joined the FIU PLTL program in Summer 2022, moving from student to Peer Leader, Group Discussion Leader (guiding Peer Leaders), and now Program Coordinator. He notes that each role taught him valuable lessons about patience, mentorship, and creating an inclusive environment where students feel encouraged to learn. In his current role, he helps oversee PLTL's operations at FIU, supporting over 1,500 students each semester as they navigate challenging coursework with peer-led learning.

He graduated with Honors in Biological Sciences from FIU and is preparing for medical school and is completing an EMT program. His passion for mentorship began as a peer mentor in community college, where he saw firsthand how much having a guide can help students during those early, often intimidating days.



9 - Dailier Ayuso

As Program Coordinator working closely with Thomas Pitzer (Faculty in Biology), Dailier has spearheaded several initiatives to enhance the PLTL Program's efficiency, including developing about 40 specialized programs that automate tasks, saving nearly an hour per task compared to manual processing. He is also working on a research project focused on PLTL, which is advancing to publication. He remarked that "Working on outreach for the Society excites me, as I look forward to expanding PLTL's reach and impact."

### Short Takes

- SHARE NEWS FROM YOUR CAMPUS! Send news items, story suggestions, and updates from your campus Peer-Led Team Learning program to [info@pltlis.org](mailto:info@pltlis.org)
- TIP: Peer Leaders! Sign up for *The Peer Leader* newsletter on the homepage of PLTLIS with your personal email (to keep in touch after graduation): Go to [www.pltlis.org](http://www.pltlis.org) and sign up!
- What experiences have you had as a mentor or team leader? How have you supported others to learn? Consider what the experience entailed and write a paper for Issue #5 of *Advances in Peer-Led Learning*, the PLTLIS journal. Deadline for submissions: **Friday, August 1, 2025**. Submission guidelines: <https://journal.pltlis.org/>
- Love social media? Already on LinkedIn? The PLTL International Society is looking for someone who would post updates, announcements, campus activities. Contact [info@pltlis.org](mailto:info@pltlis.org) to share your enthusiasm and spread the word about PLTL!
- TIP: Making a presentation about your PLTL program? Include a final slide that mentions the PLTLIS Annual Conference, the Society's website: [www.pltlis.org](http://www.pltlis.org), and email: [info@pltlis.org](mailto:info@pltlis.org)