

Growing a Sustainable Peer-Educator Program

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Why Peer Educators?

- force multiplier for professional staff
- closer to students
- cost-effective
- resistant to staffing challenges (turnover, budget)
- builds future leaders

Keywords

- Growing
- Sustainable
- Renewable

Growing

- start small
- multi-year
- learning curve
- growing pains



Sustainable

able to survive:

- departure of champions
- change of staff
- graduation of top peers
- reduction in funding

Renewable

Programs are:

- relevant to current generation of students
- innovative
- evolving with new wave of Peer Educators
- technology oriented

Our Context

- Large urban commuter university (55K students)
- college-based system (similar to Oxbridge)
- helps make a big university feel small
- all Science and Engineering students (1,500 new, 6,500 total) are part of Bethune College

Bethune College

- We provide orientation, academic, co-curricular, and extra-curricular opportunities/events, support
- Student government provides social events, intramural sports
- Academic Staff: Master (75%), Academic Coordinator (50%) Writing Tutor (40%)
- Support staff: 2.75 FTE

Our Peer Educator Programs

- Peer Mentoring
- Peer Tutoring
- Supplemental Instruction
- Class Representative/Reporter
- Peer Advising
- Student Ambassadors
- Graduate Peer Mentors

Peer Mentors

- all incoming students are assigned peer mentor
- Peer mentor in same major, 20-25:1 ratio
- Grouped by lab or tutorial
- Contact by email in summer
- Tour leader during Academic Orientation
- biweekly e-mail in fall and winter

Peer Tutors

- free peer tutoring for difficult courses (mostly first-year)
- weekdays 12:30-6:30 pm
- students who get an A in course invited to apply to be Peer Tutors the next year
- commit to at least 2 hrs/week

Supplemental Instruction

- SI for difficult courses (mostly math, chem, phys)
- “Study Groups on Training Wheels”
- Successful Peer Tutors/those who got A in course are invited to apply
- 2x90 min sessions
- SI leaders paid for 10 hrs/week

Class Reps

- first-year students enrolled in class
- announcements
- organize study groups
- Provide feedback and any concerns that arise to the attention of course instructor

Peer Advisors

- 3rd and 4th year students, experienced
- answer drop-in questions, some serious one-on-one advising
- offer weekly workshops

Other Peer Educators

- Student Ambassadors
- Graduate Peer Mentors

Senior Peer Educators

- form Executive
- supervise individual programs
- weekly meeting with their program-specific peer educators
- weekly meeting with Academic Coordinator
- work-study (paid ~10 hrs/week)

Numbers (last year)

- 21 Peer Advisors
- 57 Peer Mentors
- 21 Grad Peer Mentors
- 47 Peer Tutors
- 11 SI Leaders
- 49 Class Reps
- 8 Executive
- 6 Student Ambassadors
- 21 Grad Peer Mentors

Selection

- good students are invited to apply
- Executive vets applications
(updated CVs, personal statements)
- Invited for 2-hr, program-specific interview session
 - panel interview
 - role playing
 - group exercises/tasks
 - or Multiple Mini Interview (MMI)

Interview Day

- Program Specific
- Parallel sessions/activities
- Panel interview
- Group exercises/tasks
- Role playing
- Multiple Mini Interview (MMI)
- Ethics

Training Peer Educators

- 1-day Basic Peer Leadership
- program-specific training
eg: SI has 1-2 days by certified supervisor
- in-service: bi-weekly meetings by program
- Optional ad-hoc Advanced PL Training
- Peer Leadership courses
- weekend retreat at end of year

Basic Peer Leadership Training

Topics include:

- Peer Leadership 101
- Campus Resources
- Negotiating Boundaries
- Connecting with Profs/Staff/Students
- Communication
- Resilience
- Confidentiality

Progression of Roles

- 1st year: Class Reps
- 2nd-3rd year: Student Ambassadors
- 2nd-4th year: Peer Mentors, Peer Tutors
- 3rd-4th Year: Peer Advisors, SI Leaders, Executive
- Graduates: Grad Peer Mentors

Recognition

- Certificate of Attendance
- Courses on transcript:
 - BC 3000 0: Intro to Peer Leadership
 - BC 3010 3: Advanced Peer Leadership
 - BC 3900 0: Peer Leadership Practicum
- Letters of Reference
- Work-study (\$) for those 10 hr/week
- Co-curricular transcript (YU Connect)
- Scholarships/Awards

Personal Benefits

- Enhancing CV/Resume
- Develop transferable skills:
 - Communication
 - Public speaking
 - Problem solving
 - Interpersonal relationships
- Personal development and growth
- Contributing to improving the community
- Personal and professional networking (LinkedIn)
- Sense of achievement and self-confidence

Our Growth Trajectory

- tradition of Peer Advisors (since 1995)
- Peer Tutors next (2 years before further growth)
- piloted SI and Peer Mentors for all incoming
- full SI, Class Reps year after
- Grad Peer Mentors
- Student Ambassadors

Growing Pains

- Limited resources (funding, space, HR)
- Administrative staff inertia/additional works
- Faculty members resistant in beginning
- TA union suspicious
- Consultation process slow

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Academic Staff Training

- Master: 5 years, Academic Coordinator: 3 years
- Conferences/Workshops:
 - FYE Annual
 - Institute of Peer Educators
 - SI Supervisor training
 - NACADA
- succession planning

Responsive to Needs

- survey students, Peer Leaders
- visit departments for promotion/feedback
- measure influence on:
 - student grades
 - Institutional retention (graduation rates)
 - sense of pride/belonging
 - long-term career impact

Share your experiences
Your Feedback?

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