The Value of Peer Leaders in Active Learning
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Students at UNC Charlotte hold different roles as peer leaders in the classroom. We sought to describe these roles and their specific training to understand how each role is used in the classroom. We sent surveys to several faculty and peer leaders to solicit feedback about their experiences in the classroom. We conclude with opportunities to improve the various peer leader programs on campus.

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<th>Roles</th>
<th>Examples of Current Training</th>
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| **Preceptor** | ● Meets with students as a liaison  
  ● Helps with grading or check-ins  
  ● Leads small group study reviews  
| **Teaching Assistant / Grader** | ● Facilitates in-class activities  
  ● Holds office hours  
  ● Grades course deliverables  
| **Communication Consultant** | ● Gives feedback on written / oral assignments in class  
  ● Does not grade  
  ● May hold office hours  
| **University-, College-, and Department-level Training** | ● TA training workshops  
  ○ The College of Computing & Informatics hold these annually and explicitly discuss active learning  
  ○ Peer leader action groups for preceptors and tutors  
| **In-classroom Tutor** | ● Facilitates in-class activities  
| **Academic-center Tutor** | ● One-on-one tutoring  
  ● Drop-in group sessions  
| **Ad-hoc Training by Instructor** | ● Informal  
  ● No consistency across courses  
| **Technology Training** | ● CTL workshops on Canvas, Poll Everywhere, etc.  

### Instructor Experiences

**The responses below are from a professor for an LBST 2301 Course**

**What kind of training did you give your communication consultant before the semester?**

“Communication across the curriculum is tasked with training the CC, however, I did meet with the student and we had a general conversation on my expectations for the course. Also, before each set of consultations the CC has with students, I meet with the CC to let them know what to look out for/concentrate on for the particular assignment.”

**How did having a communication consultant benefit your students?**

“I think the students see the communication consultant as a peer they can go to with questions. They do have some level of authority but are really seen as a knowledgeable peer in the classroom.”

**What do you wish had gone differently?**

“At this point I have learned from my first semester experience with my CC and have done different practices to help make the integration much more fluid.”

**The responses below are from faculty that had preceptor support in Fall 2018 for mostly large enrollment (75+ students), Top 40-designated courses**

**What did having a preceptor in the course do for you?**

“Please explain how the preceptor did or did not help you facilitate Active Learning.”

**The responses below are from the College of Computing and Informatics who use active learning in their class and have TA/Grader/Preceptor support**

**The responses below are from faculty in the College of Computing and Informatics who use active learning in their class and have TA/Grader/Preceptor support**

**Do you require your TAs/Graders to attend class for help with class activities?**

**Overall, how often during the semester did you use Active Learning in the classroom?**

“Please explain how the preceptor did or did not help you facilitate Active Learning.”

**Do you explicitly discuss your expectations from your TAs/Graders when you hire them?**

**Overall, how often during the semester did you use Active Learning on homework assignments?**

**Did having a preceptor help you facilitate Active Learning?**

“Please explain how the preceptor did or did not help you facilitate Active Learning.”

**The responses below are from faculty that had preceptor support in Fall 2018 for mostly large enrollment (75+ students), Top 40-designated courses**

**Overall, how often during the semester did you use Active Learning in the classroom?**

“Please explain how the preceptor did or did not help you facilitate Active Learning.”

**Overall, how often during the semester did you use Active Learning on homework assignments?**

“Please explain how the preceptor did or did not help you facilitate Active Learning.”

**Did having a preceptor help you facilitate Active Learning?**

“Please explain how the preceptor did or did not help you facilitate Active Learning.”

**Peer Leader Quotes**

**The quotes below are from peer leaders in the College of Engineering**

“To discover one’s true passion is to discover an understanding of one’s self. As a teaching assistant for Introduction to Engineering, I do so much more than simply grade assignments. I aid students in discovering their passion so they may determine the knowledge and skills required to make an impact on the world. Once students discover their true passion, their understanding of their purpose, no one can stop them but themselves. As a teaching assistant, I play an active role to ensure my student’s success: to become an engineer that holds paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public. Never lose your passion.”

“Serving as a TA reveals its true value in the informal collaborative moments that happen five minutes after a class on a difficult topic. By using my past experience with that topic, I can mentor students, alone or in a group, through the process and computation associated with the subject. This feedback from students can be incorporated into future lesson plans and assignments to further engage students in the subject matter.”

**Opportunities for Improvement**

**For Peer Leaders**

- Per course/department/college as relevant  
  - Appoint Lead TA: Liaison between peer leaders and instructor/department/college  
  - Set up discussion forums (e.g., using Piazza)  
  - Organize networking events (e.g., weekly coffee hour)  
  - Create Canvas training modules

**For Instructors**

- Establish clear expectations  
  - Course/dept./college template  
  - Decide on mode of communication  
  - E-mail, WhatsApp, Slack, etc.  
  - Choose efficient workload distribution mechanism/tool  
  - Trello, Slack, etc.  
  - Ensure grading consistency  
  - Vertical division of work  
  - Check in periodically  
  - Assess performance periodically  
  - Report issues if needed  
  - Have end-of-term debriefing / post-mortem review