

Student Success Team

Peer Education Committee FINAL REPORT

Background:

Research on institutional conditions for student success highlights the important role of peers: “Peers are very important in helping students understand faculty performance expectations and standards, managing time commitments for academic work and other activities, and connecting students to the institution and other students in meaningful ways.” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 2005, p. 260) In addition, research at the University of Iowa demonstrates the impact of serving as a peer educator (e.g., tutoring, peer advising) on achieving desired outcomes of college (RISE, 2006).

Charge:

The committee will:

1. Create a taxonomy of current programs, including a definition of terms (peer mentoring, peer advising, peer tutoring, etc.)
2. Identify potential opportunities for cross-unit collaboration, such as partnerships on core training components or a core course for peer leaders
3. Recommend strategies that incorporate reflection on learning within peer experiences

Committee Members:

Tina Arthur, Orientation, Chair
Amy A’Hearn, Pomerantz Career Center
Diane Hauser, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Rachel Gatewood, Center for Diversity & Enrichment
Carol Severino, Writing Center
Amy Baumgartner, Residence Life
Teri Schnelle, Graduate Assistant, Division of Student Life

Findings:

The peer educator committee met over the course of the 2012 spring semester to gather information on current programs and determine recommendations. A similar review of programs occurred in 2008. The committee began its work by reviewing the 2008 report and revising the list of programs that currently exist at Iowa. The committee split up the groups among members to review. Please see appendix A for the taxonomy of current peer programs at The University of Iowa.

After determining which groups to review, the committee catalogued these groups based on primary function. As part of the charge and to create consistency within the committee, commonly used “peer” terms required definition in order to determine categories. The committee recognized that there are additional peer groups on The University of Iowa’s campus; however the groups included in this review share some overarching components. These groups share the following characteristics:

- Institutionally sanctioned
- Training
- Supervision
- Remuneration in the form of credit, money or leadership experience

The following are the committee’s definitions of “peer” terms used to catalogue different groups.

Student Success Team

Peer Education Committee FINAL REPORT

Definitions:

Peer Mentoring: A sustained relationship with an individual with more experience that provides support and guidance on a bigger picture item, such as how to be a better student, social integration, community integration, or how to better understand the University.

Peer Educator/Advising: A short term relationship based experience centered around educating a fellow student on a specific topic (career counseling on how to do a resume or health education) or guidance on a specific task.

Peer Counseling: A relationship based around a student in need of help with a specific personal incident or issue. This relationship could also exist within other relationships, i.e. a tutor or mentor could help students identify resources to assist with an issue.

Peer Tutoring: A relationship related directly to academic skill development or support related to a specific course. A tutor is part of systematic help for students with academic skills, including learning material specific to classroom material.

Ambassadors: Represent an institutional department or office on campus and assist with such activities as recruitment, welcoming transfer students, or programming. Ambassadors serve as role models for these programs and serve as the "face" of the department or office.

Undergraduate Teaching Assistants/Supplemental Instructors: Separate from tutoring – these are students who assist within the class, i.e. art teaching assistants, or outside as supplemental instructors who lead other students in skill development related to a specific course and serve as facilitators, not formal assessors for the course(s).

Within the taxonomy the groups are categorized by these peer definitions. There are a few groups that fall into multiple categories and this is noted.

Once groups were categorized, the committee reviewed opportunities for collaboration on training and reflection. The committee reviewed trainings already offered and available syllabi. It was determined that the groups are on many different levels of training and competence and therefore it is not recommended that a mandatory training for all groups be required. There are some groups that are already training peers at a very high level and mandating additional training is unrealistic for these groups. However, the committee did identify opportunities for cross training within groups and these are highlighted in the recommendations section.

Recommendations:

After reviewing the groups, the committee agreed that training should not be required of all groups. There are some established groups on campus that already cover a wide array of topics in detail (i.e. resident assistants, Hawkeye Guides). The committee determined that there is a core set of skills or competencies that would be ideal for college students leading their peers or thinking about taking on a peer role should have. These skills or topic areas include:

- Cultural Competency
- Communication Skills

Student Success Team

Peer Education Committee FINAL REPORT

- Leadership Training/Theory
- Student Development Theory
- Campus Resources and how to make a referral
- Ethics/University policies
- FERPA
- Interpersonal relationships/boundary setting
- Counseling strategies

Additional training for tutors could include:

- Study skills/time management/learning strategies
- Academic information/university referrals/next steps for students

The committee discussed a variety of delivery methods for cross-training these students and settled on two different options. They are outlined below.

Option 1: A one semester hour elective course (graded S/U or S/F). The course could exist in the University College and be offered twice a semester for six weeks each. Specifically, the Office of Retention may be a place for this class to be housed and the coordinator should outsource training topics to appropriate offices (Cultural Competence training to diversity officers on campus, etc.). Students who have been recently hired as peer leaders on campus would be eligible to enroll in the course, as would any student interested in learning about how to be an effective peer leader. Potentially this course could increase the number of students interested in a peer leader role on campus.

As a result of taking this course, peer leaders will be able to:

- Competently lead their peers as defined by their respective groups or organizations
- Demonstrate proficiency in course topics and skills (outlined above)
- Demonstrate growth and academic excellence as defined by the Iowa Challenge
- Learn transferable skills useful for roles across campus and in career development
- Think critically about and reflect on their own college experiences

Offering this type of course communicates to campus and students the importance and support of peer led programs. The course will provide opportunities for collaboration across departments and students' interests; it can assist in building community and focus on civility on campus. Ideally, cross-unit collaboration will eliminate duplication of effort for advisors and supervisors of peer led programs and ensure standards across these programs.

Group advisors or supervisors would have the ability to choose which students needed to take the class. In this way, we are not requiring students to complete the course, rather it would be an opt-in or recommended course that would offer a core set of skills across campus to peer leaders. Ideally, all peer groups on campus would want their peer leaders to strive for these skills in their respective positions.

Student Success Team Peer Education Committee FINAL REPORT

The committee recommends that a committee of representatives from University College, the Provost's Office, CLAS, Engineering, Business, Nursing and Education be formed to create the curriculum and develop the course.

Option 2: Create online modules and weekend workshops on different core skills topics and allow advisors, supervisors and students to pick and choose which trainings to attend. In this format, students who already receive training at a high level or groups who train on job specific skills can determine what additional training students may need to be effective peer leaders. The committee determined that 3-5 topics could be offered in this format possibly including diversity training, student development theory training and campus resources training. FERPA training already exists in an online format and could be included in its current format as a training opportunity. The Office of Retention may be a place for these workshops/online modules to be housed and the coordinator should outsource training topics to appropriate offices (Cultural Competence training to diversity officers on campus, etc.).

Regardless of which option is used for training, the committee recommends a yearly meeting of the advisors and supervisors of peer groups for brainstorming and sharing about possible training topics and methods as well as other collaborations. The committee also recommends an evaluation method of either training option to determine that outcomes are being met as well as assessment of all students participating in a peer program to learn about benefits to students and campus.

Reflection:

As part of both options, the committee wants to include reflection as an important learning tool for both peer leaders and advisors and supervisors. This is an area that the committee determined that students are not the only ones on campus who may need training. Advisors and supervisors may also need ideas and training on the importance of reflection, different types of reflection and how to incorporate reflection into a peer leader experience. Some ideas for incorporating reflection include:

- 1 minute papers
- Photo collage of experience
- Journal writing
- Oral reflection
- Interviewing peers
- Group presentations

The committee determined that this type of training could also provide collaboration opportunities across groups and recommends a yearly meeting of the advisors and supervisors of peer groups for brainstorming and sharing about how to incorporate reflection and improve the peer leader experience.

Summary:

There are multiple types of peer groups on The University of Iowa's campus. The committee believes there are opportunities for cross collaboration and increased reflection within these groups through the creation of an elective course or modules and workshops. Supervisors and advisors may also need training on how to incorporate reflection as a learning tool within the peer leader experience.