



Facilitating Peer Learning in the Library: Crafting the Perfect Batch of Undergraduate Peer Research Mentors

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Librarians at a college library developed a Peer Research Mentor (PRM) program for undergraduate students in order to facilitate peer learning and expand the library's formal instruction program beyond the traditional reach of the library and librarians. The presenters will discuss recruiting the initial cohort of eight PRMs, strengthening PRMs' research skills through an intensive training curriculum, and an overview of the various instructional outreach projects that have been designed and implemented by PRMs for other students. The presentation will discuss program assessment methods, share findings from the current cohort, and outline plans for the program's development.

The corresponding slides and this handout are available in *The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College*:
<http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/42>

Peer Research Mentor Program Goals

Peer Research Mentors will be able to:

- Demonstrate a working knowledge of information resources and services available at a small, academic library.
- Apply advanced search strategies and evaluative criteria in order to assist and mentor library users during the research process.
- Conduct a reference interview in a variety of modes (in-person, telephone, and virtually).
- Provide research support at the reference desk, in one-on-one research appointments, or in classroom/workshop settings.
- Discuss current issues surrounding access and scholarship for users in today's information environment.
- Design and implement outreach programs on topics of interest to library users.
- Contribute to a dynamic, supportive, peer research mentor learning community.

Job Advertisement

The Reference & Instruction Department of Musselman Library invites Gettysburg College students to submit applications to become a Peer Research Mentor for the 2014-15 academic year. A Peer Research Mentor is a student who works alongside librarians to support students engaged in research, while also improving one's own research skills. This position is open to four rising sophomores and two rising juniors in any major. The Peer Research Mentor team intentionally includes students representing a range of class levels (first-year student mentors will join in Spring 2015). While the appointment is for an academic year, there is potential for continuation. If you love information and helping people find exactly what they need, this could be the position for you!

Peer Research Mentors will engage in three main areas:

1. **Training.** Mentors will participate in a concentrated series of training sessions in August during the week before classes begin, as well as ongoing training throughout the year (about 1 hour per week). Training topics include basic customer service principles, navigating our online and print library collection, understanding today's information environment, search strategies, evaluating information, the inner workings of the library (from cataloging to interlibrary loan), current library issues, and other topics of interest to the mentors.
2. **Reference service.** Mentors will work at the library's main reference desk 2-4 hours per week, partnered with another peer mentor and/or professional librarian. In addition, qualified mentors may meet with students during scheduled research appointments.
3. **Outreach.** Mentors will design and implement an outreach program each semester. Each mentor will consult with a supervising librarian in order to customize a project that reflects the mentor's interest and skills. For example, a mentor might create a web research guide that supports a class assignment, meet with students completing a particular assignment, or promote reference services in other ways. This component is flexible and should support the mentor's academic interests.

Qualifications

- Desire to learn, improve, and master research skills in more than one academic subject area
- Interest or background in education, mentoring and/or tutoring
- Strong communication and organizational skills

Peer Research Mentors will be part of a learning community supported by each other as well as Fortenbaugh Interns, the Holley Intern, and librarians. Peer Research Mentors will mentor other students while becoming more successful researchers themselves.

Peer Research Mentors will work 6-8 hours per week while classes are in session, in addition to about 15 hours of paid training during the last week of summer. The pay rate is \$8.50 per hour.

To apply, submit a letter indicating your interest in the position, your education and/or career goals, any relevant courses, and the names and contact information for 2-3 references (references should be faculty members who can tell us about you and your work in the classroom, and/or your supervisor in a campus job or other relevant job). Please be specific about why you would like to be one of our very first Peer Research Mentors. Application materials must be received by Sunday, April 6, 2014 to be considered. Send application materials to xxxx@gettysburg.edu.

Have questions? We'd love to chat with you! Drop by the office (room 102, main floor, Musselman Library) or email xxxx@gettysburg.edu

Boot Camp Training Schedule

Move-In Day

- 9:00am-4:30pm: Pick up key from ResLife
- 5:00-6:30pm: Kick-Off Dinner (Library Dean's home)

Day 1 of Boot Camp

- 8:00-9:00am: Breakfast, introductions, and warm-up discussion
Discuss: What is a library? What is our library? What has your library experience been like? How do you use libraries in general? Share your personal favorite library story.
- 9:00-10:15am: Give us a library tour.
Each PRM explores a floor of the library and prepares to present important features to the other PRMs and librarians. Librarians fill in as needed.
- 10:15-10:30: Break
- 10:30-Noon: Introduction to Research
Introduce the research process which outlines the Boot Camp training. Assign research topics for remainder of training, and start with reference sources (print and online).
- Noon-1:00pm: Lunch
- 1:00-3:00pm: Discovery & Access: Books!
Local catalog vs WorldCat, searching strategies (keyword vs subject; advanced search tips), LC Call Numbers, Course Reserves, Textbooks, ILL, etc.
- 3:00-3:30pm: Break

- 3:30-5:00pm: Practice
Library Olympics: Book relay race, Where in the library is it?, and Hot seat (practice reference questions). Receive homework: Reflection – What confuses you? What do you hope to learn? What are you excited about?.

- 5:30-7:00pm: Dinner

Day 2 of Boot Camp

- 8:00-9:00am: Breakfast, meet & greet, and warm-up discussion
Introduce key library staff (Systems Librarian, ILL staff, Circulation, Building Manager). Discuss reflection questions.
- 9:00-10:15am: Discovery & Access: Finding Articles
Articles, Journals, Databases, and One Search – oh my! Includes what is a database, identifying the right resource,; searching and advanced search tips, etc.
- 10:15-10:30: Break
- 10:30-Noon: Discovery & Access: Journal Locator & Evaluation
How to use the Journal Locator to identify, locate and access individual journals and articles in library collection, retrieving full-text, or utilizing Interlibrary Loan. Cover distinguishing among types of sources (books vs articles, primary vs secondary, etc.) and critically evaluating information sources (popular vs scholarly, peer review process).
- Noon-1:00pm: Lunch
- 1:00-3:30pm: Reference Desk Basics
Reference interview with practice questions. Reference desk minutiae: LibAnswers, READ Scale, printing, and technology troubleshooting.
- 3:30-4:00pm: Break
- 4:00-5:00pm: Library Olympics & Closing Ceremonies
“Find that citation” and “Can you help me?” (reference desk scenarios). Medals and closing ceremonies.
- 5:30-7:00pm: Dinner & Final Reflections
Receive reflection homework for first one-one-one meeting with librarian mentor: “How can the library help students become better researchers?”

Bi-Weekly Peer Research Mentor Meeting Topics

Fall Semester

- Citation & bibliographic management tools
- GettDigital & introduction to Special Collections & Archives
- Open access & introduction to scholarly communication
- Outreach projects
- Civil War era resources
- Dealing with end of semester reference questions
- Interlibrary Loan and off-site storage

Spring Semester

- Ebooks
- Science resources (PRM led)
- Funky technology in the library: microfilm readers, assistive technology, and more (PRM led)
- Music resources (PRM led)
- Image sources (PRM led)
- Academic Dishonesty (PRM led with Dean of Academic Advising as guest)

Assessment – Year 1 (2014-2015)

Peer Research Mentors (PRM) completed each self-assessment in conversation with their direct supervisor at the mid-point of the fall and spring semesters. An assessment also occurred at the end of the academic year, which included additional “connections” questions.

Mid Fall/Spring Semester Assessment

Reference desk

- Have your research skills improved since beginning the PRM program? If so, describe how.
- How comfortable do you feel conducting reference interviews and helping patrons at the desk? Where do you want to improve?
- In order to improve your reference desk service, what topics would you like to learn more about?
- How well did the August boot camp prepare you for working at the reference desk? How can we improve it next time?

Outreach projects

- Do you feel prepared to design and implement your outreach project? If not, how can we better support you?

Learning community

- One of the program goals is to develop a sense of community among the PRMs. Do you think this is happening yet? Please suggest ideas for how to create and/or strengthen this community.

Next steps

- We plan to hire a couple of first-year students to join the PRM group in the spring semester. What suggestions do you have to train them and bring them into your group?

Final questions

- What have you enjoyed the most about the PRM program? What have you enjoyed the least?

End of Fall Semester Assessment

Reference desk

- What do think are your strongest skills at the reference desk? Where do you want to improve?
- After a semester at the reference desk, what topics would you like to learn more about in order to improve your service?

Outreach projects

- Write a brief paragraph summarizing your outreach project, reflecting on how you think it went.
- If you were to do this outreach project again, what would you do differently?

Learning community

- One of the program goals is to develop a sense of community among the PRMs. As we bring the new PRMs into the group, how might we continue to develop this community of learners?

Final questions

- Think about your journey through the semester. What are your goals for next semester?

End of Year Assessment**Reference desk**

- What do think are your strongest skills at the reference desk? Where do you want to improve?
- After a semester/year at the reference desk, what topics would you like to learn more about in order to improve your service?

Outreach projects

- Write a brief paragraph summarizing your outreach project, reflecting on how you think it went.
- If you were to do this outreach project again, what would you do differently?

Learning community

- One of the program goals is to develop a sense of community among the PRMs. As we bring the new PRMs into the group, how might we continue to develop this community of learners?

Connections*

- What are you learning here that's helping you in school?
- What are you learning in class that you can apply here at work?
- Can you give me a couple of examples of things you've learned here that you think you'll use in your chosen profession?

Final questions

- Think about your journey through the semester. What are your goals for next semester?

*Connections questions were modified from the University of Iowa's "Iowa Grow" program. For more information, see <http://vp.studentlife.uiowa.edu/initiatives/grow/>