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

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

Abstract
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.

Keywords
Library reference services, Peer teaching, Peer learning, Undergraduates, Academic libraries, Library outreach

Disciplines
Curriculum and Instruction | Educational Leadership | Information Literacy | Library and Information Science

Comments
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This presentation is available at The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College: http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/42
Does your library have students working in these areas?

1. Instruction
2. Reference
3. Research consultations
4. Outreach
5. None

Go to www.govote.at and use the code 22 53 56
Facilitating Peer Learning in the Library: Crafting the Perfect Batch of Undergraduate Peer Research Mentors

Mallory Jallas
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LOEX 2015
Gettysburg College / Musselman Library

- Four-year, residential, liberal arts college
- Undergraduate
- Gettysburg, PA
- FTE: 2,600

- Single library campus
- 15 librarians
- 215 instruction sessions*
- 3,163 reference transactions*
- 234 research appts.*

* Reporting on academic year 2013-2014
Why Now?

● Campus commitment to enhancing the intellectual climate
● Focus on high-impact practices
● Supporting student learning and IL
● Project Information Literacy findings
  ○ 11% seek assistance from a librarian when evaluating sources*

Why Peer Research Mentors?

Not because of...

- A merged, one-desk model
- Removing librarians from the reference desk
- Declining questions requiring a librarian
- Increasing number of research consultations
- Increasing time to do liaison work, outreach, etc.
Why Peer Learning?

- Students able to learn from another student outside of the usual faculty-librarian-student hierarchy
- PRMs able to draw upon personal experience to use language more easily understood by other students
- Draw upon social relationships to connect with students who may not otherwise seek help from a librarian
- An established part of Gettysburg’s campus culture

O’Kelly, Garrison, Merry, & Torreano, 2015; Bodemer, 2014
What formal peer-to-peer programs exist on your campus?
Peer Learning at Gettysburg

- Diversity Peer Educators
- Peer Learning Associates
- Peer Tutors
- Orientation Leader
- Residence Assistant
- Community Advisor
- Leadership Mentors
Peer Programs in Libraries

Peer Reference
Heinlen, 1976; Holliday & Nordgren, 2005; Faix et al., 2010; Stanfield & Palmer, 2010; Faix, 2014

Instruction
Bodemer, 2014; Bodemer, 2012; Holliday & Nordgren, 2005

Research consultations
O’Kelly, Garrison, Merry, & Torreano, 2015
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Training (upfront & on-going)

+ Reference Desk
+ Outreach Project

The Gettysburg Model
Program Goals

- Knowledge of resources & services @ library
- Dynamic, supportive, learning community
- Apply advanced search strategies & evaluation
- Conduct reference interviews
- Mentor library users during research process
- Research support @ reference desk
- Design & implement outreach
- Discuss current issues of access & scholarship
- Research support through consultations & workshops

Dynamic, supportive, learning community
Mentor library users during research process
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Design & implement outreach
Discuss current issues of access & scholarship
Research support through consultations & workshops

Conduct reference interviews
Hiring & Recruitment

**Faculty**
Do you have any students in your courses that would be a good fit?

**Administrators**
How can we diversify our applicants?

**Internally**
Are any of our current student workers interested?
Diversity

Different class years

Variety of majors
Training

- Boot Camp
- Bi-Weekly Cohort Meetings
- Weekly Supervisor Meetings
- Weekly Reference Exercise
Boot Camp

Cohort building

Structured around research process

Games = Fun! & Assessment

Active learning
Bi-weekly Meetings

Semester 1:
- Extension of Boot Camp
- Librarian-led
- Terrible timing

Semester 2:
- Topics from PRM interest
- PRM-led
- Better timing!
Librarian Supervisors
Reference Desk

- Two, 2-hour shifts a week
- Paired with “librarian buddy”
- Tracking “PRM Connection” in desk statistics
- Exploring “resource of the week”
“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.”
How does your library have students provide outreach to other students?

Go to www.govote.at and use the code 89 61 92
Course Connections

- PRMs worked with their previous courses
- This outreach varied by course
- Faculty response was positive and encouraging
Course Connections

- Research guide redesign
- Student perspective on the guide
- Faculty feedback on changes
- Resulted in more collaboration
Course Connections

- PRMS co-taught IL sessions
- Research consultations by PRMs
- Some courses made them required
- Some PRMs offered “office hours”
Workshops

- PRMs develop topics for workshops
- Ranged from RefWorks to sessions for international students
- Timing and attendance were issues
Videos

- Small group of PRMs
- Video production throughout semester
Assessment

Training
- Reflection
- Games

PRM Experience
- Evaluations
- Check-ins

Reference
- Reference Statistics

Outreach
- Surveys
- Web Analytics
Next Steps

- Hiring additional PRMs (2-4)
- Examining outreach program(s) impact
- Focusing on assessment
- Updating “Boot Camp” content
Questions?

Slides and handout available at: http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/42

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References


**Recommended Reading**