

Extending Our Reach

Understanding the Peer
Educator Experience

Introductions- the topic and the presenter

- Rebecca Cofer, EdD
 - GCSU Learning Center- AD
 - VT, TTU, ABAC, GCSU
 - Beginnings as a writing tutor
- Peer educator experience in higher ed
 - Dissertation turned research passion
 - Peer tutor, SI Leader, writing consultant
 - How does the experience benefit the peer educator?



Goals of this session

- Review the literature on the role of the peer tutor and/or SI Leader in higher education
- Learn about one study's approach to exploring this role in a new way
- Hear how peer educators responded to questions about rewarding aspects, their connection to campus, and views of learning
- Understand how we can use this research in our daily work



Defining some terms for this study

Peer educator

SI Leader

Peer tutor

Writing consultant

Subcategories of perceived gains



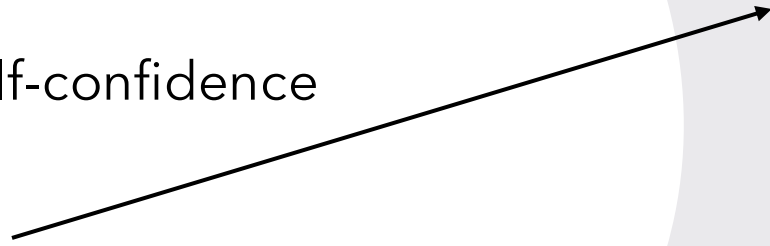
A little background of the peer educator experience

- Research focused largely on benefits for the tutees/session attendees
- Astin (1993) found peers to be the greatest influence on college students
- Discussion of peer educators limited-
 - Separated between tutors and SI Leaders- SILs had less research
 - Health peer educators
 - Holistic review as a best practices (Wilson & Arendale, 2011)



Literature Review- Tutor and SI Leader

Note the row of self-confidence and fulfillment



| Survey Item | Item Topic | Research Literature |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 2, 8, 9 | Academic performance and learning | Tutors- Galbraith & Winterbottom (2011); De Backer, Van Keer & Valcke (2012); Dioso-Henson (2012); Fiorella & Mayer (2013); Pulling & Allen (2014); Unger et al. (2014); Sneddon (2015); Al Kharusi (2016); Seo & Kim (2019); Cofer (2020) SI Leaders- Blac & Martin (1994); Smuts (2002); Congos & Stout (2003); Stout & McDaniel (2006); Lockie & Van Lanen (2008); Ning & Downing (2010); Malm et al. (2012); Adams & Bush (2013); Lozada & Johnson (2017, 2018, 2019); Hoiland et al. (2020) |
| 1, 5, 11 | Self-confidence and fulfillment | Tutors- Iwata et al. (2014); DeFeo & Caparas (2014); Sneddo (2015); Al Kharusi (2016); Nomura et al. (2017); Cofer (2020) SI Leaders- Lockie & Van Lanen (2008); Malm et al. (2012); Eller (2016); Lozada (2017); Lozada & Johnson (2018); Lozada (2019); Hoiland et al. (2020); Moorehead (2021) |
| 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12 | Non-academic skillset | Tutors- Arco-Tirado (2011), Fernandez-Martin & Fernandez-Balboa (2011); Dioso-Henson (2012); Brannagan, Dellinger, Thomas, Mitchell, Lewis-Trabeaux & Dupre (2013); DeFeo & Caparas (2014); Unger et al. (2014); Al Kharusi (2016); Bouthillette (2016); Seo & Kim (2019); Cofer (2020); Moorehead (2021); Wankiiri-Hale et al. (2021) SI Leaders- Mason-Innes (2015); Goomas (2014); Lozada & Johnson (2018, 2019) |

Gains separated by role

Peer Tutor

- Earlier research, beginning in 1970s (Bruffee, 1984)
- Heavily based in STEM tutor research
- More cognitive gains discussed- metacognition, academic performance in courses
- Clarke et al. (2015)- "It was useful for my own knowledge" (p.3)

SI Leader (SIL)

- Less research- began in 1973
- More awareness of their leadership styles and clarified career goals
- 2010- academic learning and performance gains began- STEM SIL
- Reflective studies- gains after time has passed a SIL

Background of the study

- Global study- utilized lit review to create items for survey
- Data collected in 2020
- 12 close-ended items about 3 subcategories of gains
- 5 open-ended items to supplement a few areas (self-confidence, belonging, etc.)
- Demographics- peer educator, center, campus



Participants

- 1,217 responses total
- Most identified as female, then male, and 25 nonbinary/third gender
- Academic level- close to 400 were seniors, then junior, and sophomore; 197 were former peer educators in last year
- Highest percentage- peer tutors and then served in both roles as next highest

Table 2

Respondents' Peer Educating Experience

| Experience Item | <i>n</i> | % |
|--------------------------|----------|------|
| <i>Role</i> | | |
| Peer tutor | 579 | 47.6 |
| SI Leader | 310 | 25.5 |
| Both tutor and SI Leader | 328 | 27.0 |
| <i>Length of Time</i> | | |
| 1 semester | 287 | 23.6 |
| 1 year | 267 | 21.9 |
| 2 years | 268 | 22.0 |
| 3 years | 204 | 16.8 |
| 4+ years | 191 | 15.7 |
| <i>Primary Subject</i> | | |
| Science | 344 | 28.3 |
| Math | 229 | 18.8 |
| Writing/humanities | 196 | 16.1 |
| Other* | 448 | 36.8 |

Quantitative Findings...

- Statistically significant difference in the peer educators' perceived gains based on the role(s) they had as a peer educator- tutor, SIL, or both- tutors reported greater gains
- Role versus length of time in that role
 - Tutor- significant difference in all 3 areas of gains
 - Length of time in role did not present significant differences in the gains
- Perceived most gains in area of non-academic skillset
 - Specifically- increases in their listening and communication skills and skills for their future professions

On to the qualitative data...

- 5 open-ended items, not required to enter raffle
- Total responses (of the 1217) to these questions- 546
- 1, 2, and 4 used for current research/pub
- Questions:
 - 1- How has your view of learning, both your own and others', changed as a result of your work?
 - 2- What have you found to be most rewarding?
 - 3- Did your experience as a tutor or SI Leader enrich you as a student? If so, how?
 - 4- How has your work affected your connection to campus?
 - 5- How does the experience fit in to your professional and/or personal goals outside of college?

Findings- Item 1 (View of Learning)

| Themes | <i>n</i> | Sample Respondent Statements |
|-------------------------------|----------|--|
| Learned how/ways people learn | 239 | “Helped me realize people understand better when you explain in ways they see in everyday life” |
| Learning styles/preferences | 184 | “Different people learn differently and accommodating that takes skills that I am learning as a peer tutor.” |
| Skills, qualities changed | 68 | “Made me think more critically and thoroughly” |
| Reinforced/appreciated ideas | 30 | “I have a greater appreciation for learning and education alongside others.” |
| No/little change; unsure | 19 | “No, I’ve always maintained my same beliefs” |

- Most present theme- "learned how/ways people learn"
- Least common- "No/little change"
- They both understand AND appreciated learning
- Sample responses-
 - "Being a peer tutor as shown me that learning is continuous"
 - "My view of learning has changed to be more complex and ever growing"

A former tutors' perspective

Shelby Waldrop

Previous Ag, writing tutor

Currently- Ag Ed teacher

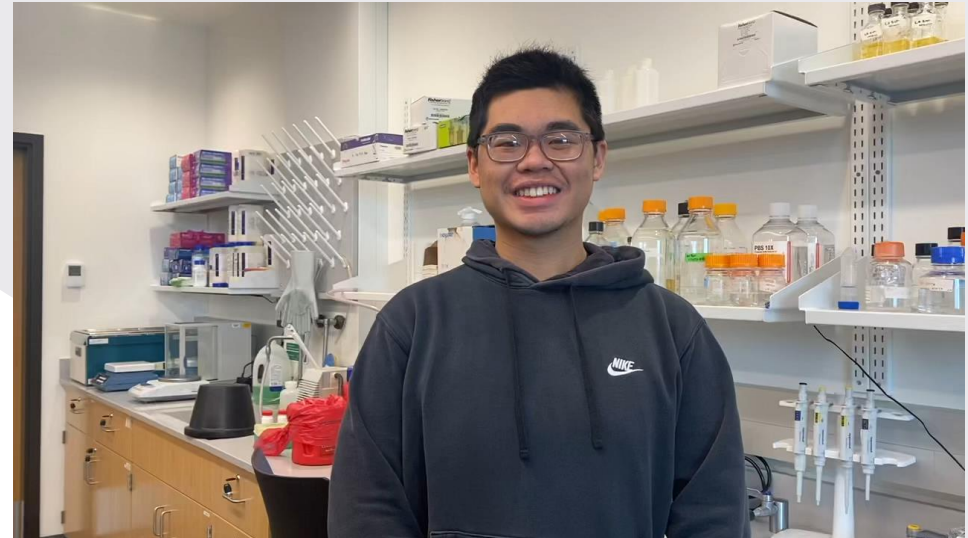


An SI Leader's Perspective on Learning

Ivan Chu

Current SI Leader for Intro Bio course

Chemistry major



Item 2 (Most Rewarding)

- 4 themes
- Most common theme ($n = 326$)- "Helping/witnessing growth"
 - The ah-ha/light bulb moment
 - "When something you're explaining finally clicks"
- Least present theme: personal gains ($n = 33$)
- Appreciated feedback, largely from students after exams





Rewarding Continued...

- Rewarding item elicited the most emotional responses
- Seeing growth in someone who was once in their position
- Helping students find value in their writing, students having more confidence in themselves after working with the tutor
 - "Seeing my students actually take interest in the course material and watch as their self-confidence grows"
- Meeting new students from different backgrounds



Let's hear from a previous peer educator....

Josh- former writing tutor, current tutoring administrator

- Rewarding aspect- getting to know people through the work
- View of learning- collaboration to co-create knowledge was impactful



Last Item- 4 (Connection to Campus)

- Connection to campus resources and people led to feelings of connection to their campus- most common theme
- Awareness of campus resources because of their work
- Least common theme- Involvement on campus
- Most responses of "unsure/little/none" for this question

| Theme | <i>n</i> | Sample Respondent Statements |
|-----------------------------------|----------|--|
| Campus people/resources | 203 | "i get to know more people from a larger variety of academic and personal backgrounds" |
| Belonging/connection | 113 | "I've felt an increased sense of belonging to the community" |
| Unsure/little/none | 82 | "Little to none, I've never had a lot of school pride and working for the school didn't change that" |
| Personal- pride, sense of purpose | 77 | "I take great pride in my role as a peer tutor" |
| Involvement/presence on campus | 40 | "It has increased my desire to be on campus as well as represent my campus positively" |

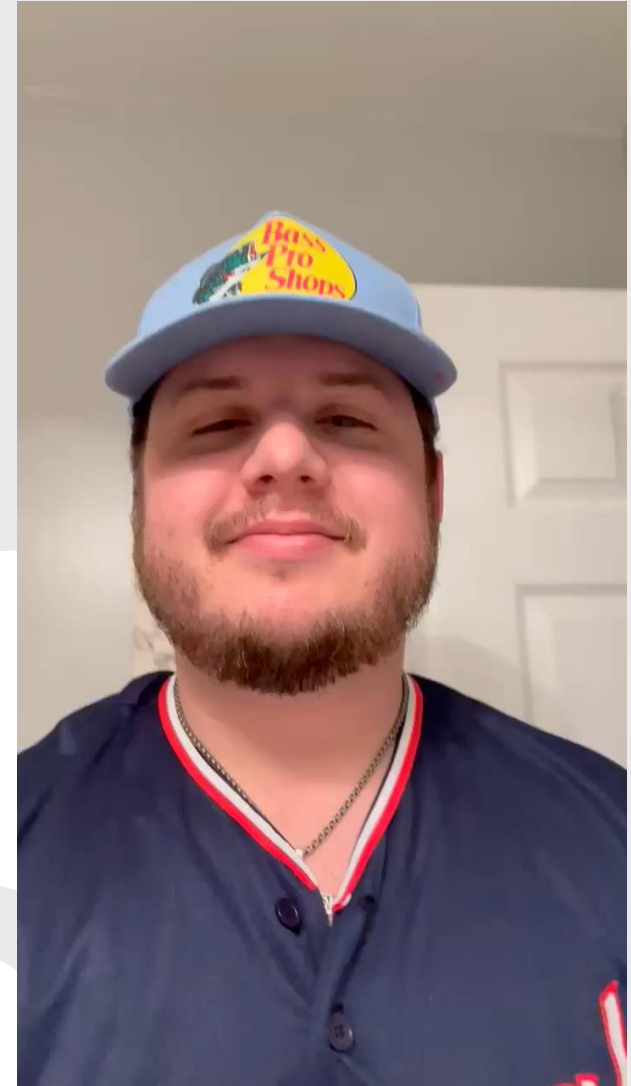
More about connection to campus theme

- Reference to the learning center becoming home/family
- Unique- "I try and remain as unconnected to the campus as possible"
- Gave them a reason to go on campus- "it gave me a reason to go to campus rather than stay at home to work on stuff"
- "It feels like I represent the university on some level"- contributing to the campus/mission
- Interesting- "I also feel like I have been judged for being 'smarter' than other students"



And more feedback from another peer educator

- SI Leader, Econ tutor
- Now GCSU alum
- How did Matt's experiences as a peer educator impact his time on campus?



How can we apply these findings to our work?

In broad sense:

- Need to be assessing the other side of the peer educator experience, not just their impact on retention
- Funding requests- extends the reach even farther
- Quant results show great difference in perceived gains for tutors- need to explore this
- Can be used in marketing for tutor, SI Leader jobs
- Training agenda applications



Application continued...

Question-specific applications

1. View of learning
 1. Growth mindset and learning theory need to be a part of training more
 2. Trainings should incorporate more reflection time
2. Most rewarding elements
 1. Provide more feedback opportunities for the peer educators, from student, staff, and each other
 2. Can these responses be used in recruiting new student staff?
3. Connection to campus
 1. Having a physical space for your student staff is important- this is their home base, as indicated by several responses
 2. In-person events/trainings are impactful and appreciated

Questions? Comments?

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References

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