Program Evaluation: Peer Advisor Program

Katherine M. Dayton

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Program Evaluation: Peer Advisor Program

Abstract
This Capstone Project assesses and evaluates the current training programs offered to peer advisor candidates and returning peer advisors at St. John Fisher College. Survey research was completed through an online survey (see Appendix C). A theme analysis as well as a descriptive analysis was conducted based on the open-ended survey responses. Focus groups were conducted with nine returning peer advisors (see Appendix C). The key messages and findings, reports on each question asked and provides the answers that were given by the participants. Recommendations included creating a calendar with events and deadlines, create an online resource library on blackboard, and have a structured meet-and-greet with the Freshman Advisor/Peer Advisors. Many of the recommendations concentrated on updating and improving some of the current resources that are already available to the peer advisors.

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First Supervisor
Timothy Franz

Second Supervisor
Mary Willoughby

Third Supervisor
Tamara Clingerman

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Program Evaluation

Peer Advisor Program

St. John Fisher College

Spring 2008

Prepared by:
Katherine M. Dayton
St. John Fisher College
Program Evaluation of the Peer Advisor Program, 2

Signature Page

Timothy Franz, Ph.D
HRD Program Director and
Associate Professor of Psychology
St. John Fisher College

4/28/08
Date

Mary Willoughby, M.S. SHRM Certified
Director of Human Resources,
Center for Disability Rights
Adjunct Professor
St. John Fisher College

10/22/2008
Date

Tamara Clingerman, Ph.D
Mental Health and Counseling, Wellness Center
St. John Fisher College
Professor at Syracuse University in the Mental Health
And Counseling Department

4/24/08
Date
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Abstract

This Capstone Project assesses and evaluates the current training programs offered to peer advisor candidates and returning peer advisors at St. John Fisher College. Survey research was completed through an online survey (see Appendix C). A theme analysis as well as a descriptive analysis was conducted based on the open-ended survey responses. Focus groups were conducted with nine returning peer advisors (see Appendix C). The key messages and findings, reports on each question asked and provides the answers that were given by the participants. Recommendations included creating a calendar with events and deadlines, create an online resource library on blackboard, and have a structured meet-and-greet with the Freshman Advisor/Peer Advisors. Many of the recommendations concentrated on updating and improving some of the current resources that are already available to the peer advisors.
Introduction

First year students need assistance with transitioning from high school to college. Academic, social, and emotional changes are prevalent among first year students. The Peer Advisor program at St. John Fisher College allows first year students the opportunity to have a resource who is their age and can assist with this transition. Peer Advisors participate in an August training as well as fall and spring courses geared specifically for Peer Advisors. They work directly with assigned Freshman Advisors, who consist of staff and faculty members at St. John Fisher College. These Peer Advisors and Freshman Advisors work together in facilitating the Freshman Seminar course that all first year students are required to take their first semester at St. John Fisher College.

Peer Advisors play an imperative role at college. “Peer advisors are an integral part of the College’s pre-major advising program and the first point of contact for incoming College students. They provide the perspective of an upper class student in the College and assist first-year students in making the transition from high school to Penn by sharing strategies for academic success and knowledge of campus”(www.college.upenn.edu). Peer advisor programs also play an important role in the retention of first year students. “A strong peer leadership program has the potential to create an environment where peers can maximize their abilities to create change and, by taking action, can have a measurable impact on school climate and peer relationships”(Tivan, p.25). At Cosumnes River College they decided that, “despite the plethora of reasons for the high dropout rates of new students, we must do something to try to rectify this unacceptable situation...The learner-centered course helps students at our commuter campus to develop support networks, identify potential barriers to success, and learn about campus resources that can help them to overcome these barriers”(www.ijournal.us/issue). Though St.
John Fisher College is a residential campus, there are also a large percentage of students who commute. Therefore, it is important to reach all students, not just those that live on campus.

“Peer education programs on college campuses training students to provide information to and programming for fellow students. Seventy-eight percent of colleges and universities in the United States have invested in programs using paraprofessionals or peer educators to meet the needs of college students” (Klein, Sondag, & Driolte, 1004). Empowering and educating students to teach other incoming students is not only a cost efficient way to educate but also received positively by first year students. “Peer educators create behavior change in campus settings by serving as a role models portraying proactive behavior as normative behavior” (Badura, 2000). Students in their first year want to fit in and are going to look to seasoned students (upper-classmen) to see how to act and what social situations to participate in. That is why it is imperative for those peer advisors to be trained to take their role seriously and have the ability to create those professional boundaries with their advisees.

The implementation of a Peer leadership program needs to be strategic. “Peer leadership programs require a strong focus on the leadership development process, the recruitment, education and training, and skill development of student leaders” (Tivan, p.21). It is important to not only create a safe space in the freshman seminar class but also while Peer Advisors are going through training. The hope of hiring a Peer Advisor is that their leadership skills are well developed. These desired skills include: time management, communication, professional, or decision making skills.

Peer Advising Evaluation at St. John Fisher College, the coordinators of the Peer Advisor program at St. John Fisher College would like to determine whether the courses and training provided are indeed meeting the needs of the Peer Advisors. In addition, they would
like to find a stronger balance between academics and student life aspects. Currently, the coordinators are placing considerable time and energy into the training and education of the peer advisors. The coordinators of the Peer Advisor program want to hear feedback from current and new peer advisors so that they can strengthen the program and further improve program results.
Methodology

This following study consisted of both qualitative as well as quantitative research. Qualitative research is “collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data by observing what people say or do” (http://uk.geocities.com). Focus groups were utilized for the purpose of qualitative research. Quantitative research “is research involving the use of structured questions where the response options have been predetermined and a large number of respondents is involved” (http://uk.geocities.com). A survey conducted through survey monkey was used for the quantitative research.

Focus groups (see Appendix C) were set-up at two different dates and times. All returning peer advisors were contacted and invited to attend either session. There was one focus group conducted with nine participants who attended. The focus group provided an opportunity to discuss feedback and input they have regarding the current peer advisor training program. The focus group took approximately 90 minutes and all participants were returning/experienced Peer Advisors who could assess current training of all programs (ITDY 220, 320/420, and August training). Participants signed the consent forms, independently wrote down their answer to questions, and then each question was discussed by each participant and these discussions were facilitated by the moderator. Participants ranged in year of sophomore to senior with experience ranging in one year to four years.

A survey (see Appendix C) was given to peer advisor candidates currently enrolled in the ITDY 220 course, which is a three credit leadership seminar that is taken in the spring semester and current peer advisors who have been a Peer Advisor for at least one year. The purpose of assessing the two different groups was to uncover any anticipated training needs. In addition, feedback provided insight that could be used to share with the current training programs in place.
There were 40 surveys sent out via email to former and current peer advisors. Sixteen peer advisors and ten peer-advisor candidates responded, with a return response rate of 65%. The survey concentrated on the overall Freshman Seminar and what content areas the peer advisors feel are important to address. Additionally, the survey measured the difference in responses from peer advisor candidates and returning peer advisors. The purpose being to assess anticipated and current needs of candidates and returners.

Results

Disclaimers

This research study concentrated on the peer advisor. The research provided insight on the peer advisor perspective. It will not focus on the perspective of the program coordinators, freshman advisor, or first year students. Additional research should be completed to get a better interpretation of the opinions of those populations.

Survey Assessment

The quantitative assessment was completed through Survey Monkey (see Appendix C, pg. 39). There were 40 surveys sent out, 20 to peer advisor candidates, 20 to returning peer advisors. The response was 10 peer advisor candidates and 16 current peer advisors. The purpose of this assessment was to compare anticipated/current training needs.

A theme analysis was conducted based on the question “In your opinion, which hot topics are most important for assisting first year students?” Based on the results, the answers were organized into four categories: academic, emotional, financial, and social. This allowed for a clear comprehension of the various topics the peer advisors felt were important for them to address in the Freshman Seminar course.
Theme Analysis of the question: “In your opinion which hot topics are most important for first students:

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<tr>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Social</th>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Dishonesty</td>
<td>Credit Cards</td>
<td>Eating Disorders</td>
<td>Alcohol Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add/Drop</td>
<td>Debit</td>
<td>Homesickness</td>
<td>Alcohol/Drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core/Major Requirements</td>
<td>Financial Responsibility</td>
<td>LGBT/Sexuality</td>
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<td>Course Registration</td>
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<td>Professor Issues</td>
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<td>Relationship with Professors</td>
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<td>Study Skills</td>
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<td>Time Management</td>
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<td>Webmail/Fishernet</td>
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Based on this analysis, the respondents provided a variety of answers. The majority of responses were topics covered in one of the peer advisors courses (ITDY 220/320/420). One of these responses would be credit card debit and credit cards in the economic section. The society we live in today, we must be extremely cautious of our credit score and how we balance our money. First year students might just be learning these skills and providing education in a Freshman Seminar class, might assist with this skill set.

The second theme that was prevalent when asked about hot topics, was academics. The academic support that Peer Advisors provide with the Freshman Advisor will allow them to
reach all first year students. According to Monograph Series entitled Peer Leadership, “the opportunity to meet with a peer in the residence hall not only makes advising more convenient, it also diminished the anxiety first-year students may feel in approaching a faculty or staff advisor” (Hamid, p.54). Furthermore, “by serving as a link between first-year students and the intuition’s academic advising system, trained peer advisors do not replace faculty, but rather complete them” (Hamid, p.54). It is evident through the responses that the Peer Advisors are aware of the importance of the academic piece of their role.

The final two themes that were prevalent when asked about hot topics were social and emotional topics that First year students face. College presents the opportunity to explore and take different paths as first year students continue or begin to chart their course for the future (Coleman, p. 77). First year students need assistance with social and emotional changes and experiences. “The ability to care for yourself requires knowing who you are, seeing yourself as worthwhile, and being motivated to care for yourself” (Coleman, p.77). Most first year students up until they leave for college or even while they are still attending, are being taken care of by their parents or guardians. For the first time they have to choose their bedtime, make new friends, and choose what extra curricular involvement they are going to participate in. College students recognize certain features as positives or negatives when they assess their own or others appearances. “When you come to know your body in balance, imbalances and stresses will be more readily detected and can then be corrected” (Coleman, p.85). Peer advisors can assist first year students with being aware of their emotional and physical needs. Peer advisors understand the stress and change the first year student is going through because it is still a process that the peer advisor might be going through.
Descriptive Analysis

The following question was asked in the quantitative research survey (See Appendix E for graphs): "Utilizing the following scale, 1-Not Applicable, 2-Not Comfortable, 3-Adéquate, 4-Comfortable, 5-Comfortable/Confident please state your comfort level with the following:

- Lesson Planning

Analysis: 80% of the Peer Advisor candidates selected a rating of comfortable or higher and 100% of the returning peer advisors selected a rating of comfortable or higher. This appears to be an area that Peer Advisor candidates are mostly comfortable with but could still use additional development. Current Peer Advisors feel very comfortable with this skill.

- Student Development

Analysis: 50% of the Peer Advisor candidates selected a rating of comfortable or higher with the reverse of that being that 50% selected a rating of adequate or not comfortable. The returning peer advisors had the highest rating of 4 with the next most common answer being tied between adequate and very comfortable/confident. Additionally, there was one returning peer advisor who chose not applicable and one who chose not comfortable. This is a topic area that both groups need more development in, with half of the participants stating that they are either adequate or not comfortable. Additional questions testing competencies should be completed to assess their understanding of this topic and its importance.

- Facilitating Conflict Resolution

Analysis: 70% peer advisor candidates rated themselves as comfortable or higher. For returning peer advisors had 75% were comfortable or higher when facilitating conflict
resolution. Additional training should be completed with facilitating conflict. Conflict impacting first year students includes their roommates, professors, or friends.

- Promotion Diversity & Intergroup Dialogue

Analysis: 80% of the peer advisor candidates rated themselves as comfortable or very comfortable. For returning peer advisors had 56% were comfortable with the promotion of diversity and intergroup dialogue. Diversity is a sensitive topic for anyone. For many first years coming to college because the Peer Advisor candidates are in fact candidates, further analysis should be completed to understand the vast difference in this answer from the candidate to returner. One would think it would be the other way around since the returner has had more experienced training in this area.

- Fostering Academic Excellence

Analysis: 90% of the peer advisor candidates were comfortable or very comfortable/confident. The returning peer advisors had 94% were comfortable or higher with fostering academic excellence. This is a content area that both groups scored very high on.

- Resources to Make Healthy Life Choices

Analysis: 100% of the peer advisor candidates were comfortable or very comfortable/confident. The returning peer advisors had 88% were comfortable or very comfortable/confident with providing resources to make healthy life choices for the first year students. This is a content area that both groups scored very high in. Further questioning should test the difference in competency from the candidate and returner.

- Leadership Skills
Analysis: According to the survey, all respondents selected either comfortable or very comfortable/confident with their leadership skills.

- Academic Progress

Analysis: 100% of the peer advisor candidates selected comfortable or very comfortable/confident, where 81% peer advisors selected comfortable or very comfortable/confident with assisting with the academic progress of first year students. This is another area that there is a large difference in percentage from candidate and returner.

- Answering Course Registration Questions

Analysis: 90% of the peer advisor candidates selected comfortable or very comfortable/confident, with one respondent stating they are not comfortable. Returning peer advisors rated 63% comfortable or very comfortable/confident. Additionally, 38% rated adequate or not comfortable with answering course registration questions. This is a content area that needs further development. With the continued difference between candidate and returner, further assessment should be looked into so they the confidence and knowledge answer correctly about course registration.

- Providing Academic Support to First Year Students

Analysis: 90% of the peer advisor candidates selected comfortable or very comfortable/confident. With 81% of the peer advisor returners selected comfortable or very comfortable/confident. This content area addresses the importance of keeping returning peer advisors updated on any changes to course requirements that the candidates possibly are already aware of.
Focus Group Analysis

Key Messages and Findings

Five questions were posed to the focus group. Those questions and the resulting findings are presented below.

The first question that was asked was “if you could change one part of the peer advisor program, what would you change?” One respondent stated that they would like to have “more interaction in the second semester” with the first year students. That they spend all of this time with their first year students in the fall semester but then in the spring they don’t see them and “they are still freshman and need help.” There were four respondents that stated that the courses “320/420 are the same as 220” and that “they would like 320/420 to be more discussion.” Additionally, one respondent stated that “the second year as a peer advisor you should be able to be more independent.” They do not feel they need to take 420, as they believe they know how to be a peer advisor and should not have to do “busy work because we don’t benefit from it.” Finally, one respondent stated that they would like to “start 320/420 with a team builder because it is hands on and would allow the class to be more fun.”

The second question that was asked was “if you had to keep one part of the peer advisor program, what would you keep?” The most common answer for this question was “orientation week.” Participants reported enjoying taking the lead, getting to know the students, and being right there to assist in the adjustment to college. Additionally, they like meeting the faculty and students and the fact that orientation is student run (by the core team). Participants also like creating lesson plans and presenting the lesson plans to the first year students. Another respondent stated “I enjoy being matched with faculty that I would
not normally have met.” Finally, one respondent stated that they enjoyed the open discussion they have in the peer advisor 320/420 class to discuss what they are confronting in their freshman seminar classes.

The third question that was asked was “how would you describe the working relationship between freshman advisors and peer advisors?” There were mixed responses to this question. One respondent said “my relationship was professional, we would meet and the freshman advisor helped plan some lessons and would jump in if I missed something.” Some respondents stated that “we had a good relationship, we collaborated both years.” Another respondent stated “depends on faculty advisor, if you are not on the same page, you don’t know what to do expect.” Additionally, this respondent stated that “I had a great relationship, the relationship is important because it rubs off on everyone else (meaning the first year students).”

There were a couple of respondents who did not have positive relationships. One respondent stated “we met, they were unreliable and didn’t show up for class most of the time.” Finally, one respondent stated that the “the faculty left for five minutes at the end of the day so that I could meet with the freshman students by myself and answer any real questions they might have.” When the respondent stated this other participants stated they “wished that happened in their class.”

The fourth question that was asked was “Do you have any comments or suggestions that you would like to share with program coordinators which you believe would help improve future peer advisor programs?” The following are a list of suggestions that the respondents stated:
### Positive Feedback:
- Keep relationship with Tom and Margie and the peer advisors - its good!
- Keep it going - so many students benefit from this program!
- They are doing much better with retention and recruitment!

### Constructive Feedback:
- Schedule like majors with assigned learning community and peer advisors
- Allow for open discussion because 320/420 can get repetitive
- Second year peer advisors need less interaction in an outside classroom out of the actual freshman seminar class.
- Lots of dates and feel they could do a better job telling their freshman what they can write a paper on. Possibly create a calendar?
- Create a resource library on blackboard that is up to date
- Would like to have an individual meeting with assigned freshman advisor and program coordinators. This would assist in awkward first meeting.
- Update blue binder, some of the stuff is fifteen years old and the lesson plans are not recent.
- Freshman Advisor/Peer Advisor meeting - more structure, ice breaker, or possibly a meal. The first meeting is very awkward if you do not know the faculty member. You don’t know what to say or how to act.
- Eliminate journals or just have them in the beginning or in the end. Just seems like busy work.

The fifth question that was asked during this focus group was “do you have any words of wisdom for future peer advisors?” Some of words of wisdom included:

- Plan extra for class
- Freshman like food and candy
- What you put in is what you get out!
- Have good relationships with Tom and Margie, with other peer advisors, with the freshman advisor, and with your students.
- Don’t let the freshman advisor take total control of the class.
- Stay in contact with freshman and freshman advisor
- Great opportunity to meet people
- Build positive relationships with your freshman and get to know their name.
The final question that was asked was “Do you have any questions would like to ask, or feedback you would like to offer to:

**Program Coordinators:**

Questions that participants had:

1. What is the process for choosing freshman advisors?
2. Whose role is more important the freshman advisor or peer advisor?
3. How can you put a grade on leadership?
4. How can we help the peer advisor program grow?
5. Would it be possible to evaluate freshman advisors? They evaluate us.

**The Freshman Advisors:**

Questions that participants had:

1. How much training do you get?
2. What are your goals and expected outcomes with your freshman seminar class?
3. What do you see your peer advisor as? Equal or student opinion?
4. What would they like to change?
5. What is one thing they would like peer advisor to take over?

Feedback that participants had:

1. Allow for peer advisors to participate in all classes
2. Allow for five minutes at the end of each class for peer advisor to answer questions or have discussion with the class without the freshman advisor present.
3. Encourage icebreakers/team builders in the beginning of the semester so that the class gets comfortable with one another.

The peer advisors overall seem very pleased with their experience in this program. The results from the focus group assessment included: updating resource information and accessibility to those resources (online instead of paper copy). Returners also want to work on the freshman advisor/peer advisor relationship and they offered some suggestions for doing so. Finally, one of their main concerns is that they feel that the IDTY 320/420 is very repetitive and they offered some recommendations to alter the current course outline.
Recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations based on quantitative and qualitative research. Recommendations include direct suggestions from the participants from the focus group and survey:

1. **Create a Calendar with events and deadlines**-
   Create and maintain an online calendar with events and deadlines to assist in the organization of the peer advisors. This would assist with accountability and communication to the first year students. Peer advisors would be able to have a clear visual resource to know what is happening on campus, deadlines, and important registration dates.

2. **Interview or survey first year students**-
   Interview or survey first year students before freshman orientation/great beginnings to assess anticipated needs, which could be done during the summer before orientation. In the middle of the semester conduct another survey and again at the end of freshman seminar. This will allow the Peer Advisor program to continue to survey again the first year students to assess if their anticipated needs are being met.

3. **Create an online resource library on Blackboard**
   Creating an online resource library on Blackboard would provide all peer advisors with update to date resources at their finger tips. This would allow all peer advisors to work together and share information that they have found. Additionally, this would help the program coordinators because they would not have to set up a time to meet with the peer advisors and could instead sort through paper files of resources.
4. Restructure the ITDY 320/420 course as a staff meeting rather than a course

Allow for open discussion and support through the fall semester. Each peer advisor could take a turn at facilitating the meeting with a topic or question. Which covered an the opportunity for experienced peer advisors and new peer advisors to create a stronger mentor/mentee program. Begin each meeting with an icebreaker or team builder and then lead into a “check-in” of what is going on in their assigned freshman seminar.

5. Replace journals with a weekly status report

Create a weekly status report that can be available on blackboard and can be emailed to either of the program coordinators. This can serve as a reflection based on a couple of structured questions. Questions could include what is going well and what could improve with their freshman seminar class. This would allow the program coordinators to stay current with what is going on with their peer advisors on a weekly basis.

6. Organize a structured freshman advisor/peer advisor meet-and-greet luncheon during August training

Provide advanced notice to each freshman advisor and require their attendance.

Assigned freshman advisors and peer advisors will sit together with other pairs the Freshman Advisors and peer advisors. There could be a bucket of questions on the table in which everyone takes a turn in answering. This would assist in breaking the ice and facilitate a structured meaningful conversation. This would also allow Freshman Advisors and peer advisors to get to know each other. If a Freshman
Advisor cannot attend, Program Coordinators and Freshman Advisor would meet together with peer advisor.

7. Evaluation of freshman advisor

Peer advisors would complete an evaluation of the freshman advisor which would be submitted to the program coordinators. After the evaluation is completed, program coordinators and peer advisors would have an individual meeting to discuss the evaluation.

8. Create a resource guide or protocol for answering academic related questions

A resource guide or protocol for answering academic related questions would assist the Peer Advisors with only answering questions that they are permitted to ask. Other questions outside of their permitted list would be directed to the freshman advisor. This would increase a more structured boundary between what is a freshman advisor question and what is a peer advisor question.

9. Allow for peer advisors to create lesson plans on the hot topics that they selected in the theme analysis

In ITDY 220 peer advisor candidate’s practice writing lesson plans. Utilize this list to create lesson plans but allow for addition of new topic ideas. Also allow them to present on areas they feel are most important to first year students. Peer advisors could work together to create lessons on all topics that could then be added to the online resource library.

10. Build more student development theory into the ITDY 220 course
This would allow peer advisor candidates to learn on the level of a professional and not just as a student. The foundation of theory can relate to the teaching in the classroom and help Peer Advisors better understand why students do what they do.

11. Additional research needs to be completed to understand the discrepancy between Peer Advisor Candidates and Returning Peer Advisors level of comfort with content areas

Based on the responses to the descriptive analysis, there appears to be a vast difference in comfort between Peer Advisor candidate and returner, with the difference favoring the candidate. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if it is because:

1. They are not aware of the topic,
2. It is fresh in their minds because they are currently taking the Leadership seminar course
3. Its because they don’t want to admit they might not know the content because they are currently applying for the position.

Key Themes from the recommendations:

- Update resource information and accessibility for the peer advisors to plan lessons
- Work to strengthen the peer advisor/freshman advisor relationship
- Create concrete responses to academic related questions for peer advisors to tell their first year students
- Continue research to figure out why there is a gap between peer advisor candidates and returners with their comfort level with certain content areas.

Summary/Conclusion

The following survey attempted to prove:
• That there is a difference in comfort level between the peer advisor candidates and returners
• The current training program is meeting the needs of the peer advisors
• Academic and Student development needs are being met

The following eleven recommendations were provided:
• Create a calendar with events and deadlines
• Interview or survey with first year students
• Create an online resource library on blackboard
• Restructure the ITDY 320/420 course as a staff meeting rather than a course
• Replace journals with a weekly status report
• Organize a structured freshman advisor/peer advisor meet-and-greet luncheon during August training
• Evaluation of freshman advisor
• Create a resource guide or protocol for answering academic related questions
• Allow for peer advisors to create lesson plans on the hot topics that they selected in the theme analysis
• Build more student development theory into ITDY 220 course
• Additional research needs to be complete to understand the discrepancy between Peer Advisor candidates and returning Peer Advisors level of comfort with content areas

This program evaluation showed that the participants in the focus group recognize the recruitment and retention efforts made by the coordinators. Additional research should be conducted to gain the perspective of the freshman advisor, first year student, and program coordinators.
References


Appendix A

Annotated Bibliography


Author, David S. Anderson is Associate Research Professor in the center for the Advancement of Public Health at George Mason University. Author, Sally Coleman is a staff counselor in the University Of Notre Dame’s counseling center and the author of several books.

This book provides the structure for creating a holistic wellness as well as understanding, and eliminating the abuse of alcohol and drugs on college campuses. Traditionally, alcohol and drug abuse education has focused on treatment vs. prevention.


Author, Rhonda H. Atkinson is currently an assistant professor at central Missouri State University where she teaches college reading courses. She has been in the field of higher education for over 20 years. Author, Debbie Longman is currently an associate professor at Southeast Louisiana State University. For over 20 years, she has been teaching college reading and developmental education courses.

This book provides strategies and study skills that can help college students be successful. Additionally, this book discusses advice on coping with the stress of taking exams.


Author, Amy S. Badura works for the Department of Psychology at Creighton University.

This research study examined 30 traditional, full-time, undergraduate students from a Midwestern Jesuit university. All participants were enrolled in the peer education training class in the spring semester of 1999. This study tests how peer educators can impact the behavior of a campus setting.


Author, Nancy J. Evans is an associate professor of professional studies in education at Iowa State University. Author, Deanna S. Forney is professor of counselor education and college student personnel at Western Illinois University. And the final Author, Florence Guido-DiBrito is an associate professor in the College Student Personnel Administration Program at the University of Northern Colorado.
The book focused on many theories of students’ intellectual, cognitive, social, moral, and identity development during the college years. The book is designed to help professionals who work directly with college students to encourage their developmental growth.


Author, Suzanne L. Hamid is the Director of First Year Programs at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee. She also directs the Gateway to University Success which includes incorporating Peer leadership into their first year seminar.

This book or monographs purpose is to address the work of peer leaders and their influence/role in shaping the first-year experience. Additionally, there are research studies that demonstrate the impact of having peer leadership in a freshman seminar setting.


Author, Dr. John W. Santrock has taught at the University of Charleston and the University of Georgia before working at the University of Texas at Dallas. Author Jane S. Halonen, has a lot of experience with critical thinking and has worked with Santrock on numerous publications

This book in its very organized fashion, teach students how to apply their skills to every day work with their academic and professional careers. Some skills include: exploring learning styles, setting goals and planning, and managing time.


Author, Dr. John N. Gardner is an Executive Director at the Policy Center on the First Year of college at Brevard, North Carolina. Author, Jerome Jewler is one of the developers of the University 101 freshman seminar at the University of South Carolina, where they are both faculty members.

This book puts forth guidance, activities, and strategies for developing the academic and personal strengths that will allow students to be success in their college years. This book also allows for discussion and interactive activities during freshman seminar class.


Katrina Glanzer is the contact at The College of Arts & Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania for the Peer Advisor Program.
This website is the position description of the Peer Advisor program at the College of Arts & Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania.


Author Beverly Showers is an Educational Consultant for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. This organization was founded in 1943 and is one of the largest professional development organizations for educator leaders. Bruce Joyce has written many books about teaching, peer coaching, and implementing new strategies.

This article discusses how peer coaching can enhance staff development efforts and offer support for teachers by implementing new strategies. This article also discusses the history, principles, recommendations, and references for peer coaching.


Author, Lorraine Tiven is the Director of Peer Education for the Anti-Defamation League.

The resource guide provides a definition of peer leadership programs. It also provides components of successful programs. Additionally, it provides a list of suggested resources for those interested in peer advisor programs to read.


Author, Lois J. Zachary is a specialist in the area of adult development, learning, and principal of Leadership Development Services, a consulting firm that offers leadership education and training corporate and nonprofit organizations across the United States.

The book offers realistic tools for facilitating the experience of being a mentor. Based on the popular concept that mentoring is a learning journey, in which the mentor and mentee take together. This book also offers resources and activities for mentors and mentee's to complete together.
December 1, 2007

Margie Murphy
Director of Academic Affairs
Coordinator of Freshman Seminar
St. John Fisher College
3690 East Avenue
Rochester, NY 14618

Tom Rodgers
Director of Campus Life
Coordinator of Freshman Seminar
St. John Fisher College
3690 East Avenue
Rochester, NY 14618

Dear Margie and Tom,

This letter is to follow-up with the conversation that we had in regards to the Peer Advisor program that you both facilitate. For my capstone project, as we discussed I would like to work with you and your group of Peer Advisors to assess the training program and create any recommendations as necessary.

Background

This topic is important to your organization for a number of reasons. For one, it is important to reexamine a training program to make sure it is still meeting the needs of the peer advisors. Additionally, having a consultant assess the program will allow for new perspective on the overall program.

In this project, I will assess the Peer Advisor program as well as the training offered in August of every year. As a result of the individual meetings that were conducted with each of you, we will work to find a balance between academic and student development to meet the needs of both parties.

Problem Statement

This project will assess the Peer Advisor program and create recommendations that will assist in development of the peer advisors. This will impact the Freshman Seminar Course where the Peer Advisor and Freshman Advisor work hand in hand.
Statement of Goals

The goal of this project is to: research similar peer advisor and training programs that are offered at relatable institutions; observe a Freshman Seminar class, observe the training 320/420 class in the spring. I will create a survey to be completed by the peer advisors. I will also conduct two focus groups in the spring to discuss the 320/420 class, where advisors taking the class will have an opportunity to discuss the program.

Based on the research, observations, survey, and focus groups, I will generate recommendations (if necessary) for the August training program and 320/420 class.

Method

For this project I will utilize quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group) analysis. From the Peer Advisor program, I will survey 20 Peer Advisors, 10 new peer advisors, 10 1st/2nd year advisors. In addition, I will conduct a focus group of Peer Advisors.

Work Phases/Steps

1. Conduct background investigation into best practices;
2. Obtain permission from Academic Affairs/Campus Life Offices
3. Creation and approval of IRB proposal (Spring)
4. Observe 320/420 class in spring (Spring)
5. Conduct a quantitative survey of advisors; 20 total, 10 new peer advisors, 10 1st/2nd year advisors (January 2008)
6. Conduct a focus group of the 2008-2009 Peer Advisor Team (February 2008)
7. From observation and research create recommendations (if necessary) and a draft of an updated training program to be used for August 2008.
8. Meet with the Coordinators of the Peer Advisor program to review the outcomes and proposal for change; and (anticipated, March 2008)
9. Create a qualitative survey to be used by the Coordinators of the Peer Advisor program in Fall 2008 (Spring)
10. Deliver report to Academic Affairs/Campus Life Offices

Needs/Expenses for Client

There are no financial commitments from the Academic Affairs/Campus Life Offices for their involvement with this project. However, if you were to hire a consultant, the cost would be approximately $50/$75 an hour, with an estimated amount of 150 work hours being spent on this project. Therefore, I will require access to the Peer Advisor course and permission to survey/interview new/current Peer Advisors.
If you agree to participate in this project sign below.

I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to working with both of you on this project.

Regards,

Katie Dayton
Human Resource Development

__________________________
Tom Rodgers
(Signature and date)

__________________________
Margie Murphy
(Signature and date)
Appendix C

Institutional Review Board Proposal

Katherine M. Dayton

St. John Fisher College

Masters in Human Resource Development

February 1, 2008
Program Evaluation of the Peer Advisor Program at St. John Fisher College

Introduction

First year students need assistance with transitioning from high school to college. Academic, social, and emotional changes are prevalent with first year students. The Peer Advisor program at St. John Fisher College allows first year students the opportunity to have a resource their age that can assist with this transition. Peer Advisors participate in an August training as well as a fall and spring courses geared specifically for Peer Advisors. Peer Advisors work directly with an assigned Freshman Advisor, whom are made up of staff and faculty at Fisher. The Peer Advisor and the Freshman Advisor work together in facilitating the Freshman Seminar course that all first year students are required to take their first semester at St. John Fisher College.

The coordinators of the Peer Advisor program hope that the courses and training provided is indeed meeting the needs of the Peer Advisors. In addition, they would like to find a stronger balance between academics and student life aspects. Currently, the coordinators are placing a lot of time and energy into the training and education of the peer advisors. In the end, the constructors want to hear feedback from current and new peer advisors in hopes to strengthen the program.

Purpose

The purpose is to conduct a program evaluation study of the peer advisors to assist with the following:

1. To assess if the current training/coursework is meeting the needs of the Peer Advisors
2. To find a more effective balance between academic and student development philosophies

This evaluation will provide an opportunity for a non-biased third party to assess the program and provide any recommendations as necessary.

Methodology

The following study will concentrate on both quantitative, as well as qualitative research. Focus groups will be utilized for the purpose of qualitative research. A survey conducted through survey monkey will be used for the quantitative research.

Focus groups will be conducted with new peer advisors that are just beginning the program and as well returning peer advisors. These focus groups will provide an opportunity to discuss any feedback and input they have to the current peer advisor program training. The focus groups will include 5-10 subjects and will be held in a secure location.

A survey will be given to former as well as current peer advisors who are still undergraduate students at St. John Fisher College. There will be 30 surveys sent out to former and current peer advisors with getting a return response of 20, 10 males and 20 females. The survey will concentrate on the overall Freshman Seminar and what content areas the peer advisors feel are important to address.

Dissemination

Based on the findings three reports will be compiled. Two copies of the report will go directly to the instructors of the Peer advisor program. The third report will be to fulfill the requirements for the Graduate Human Resource Development 590-Applied Research project.

Conclusion
The peer advisors play a significant role with first year students and their acclimation to the Fisher community. The following research study will provide feedback and if necessary recommendations to the peer advisor program and the training offered in August. Furthermore, it will assist in finding a balance between the academic and student development philosophies.
Appendix A

Part A is a Qualitative Feedback, and Part B gives you the Quantitative Evaluation.

Focus Group Questions

1. If you could change part of the Peer advisor program, what would you change?

2. If you had to keep one part of the Peer advisor program, what would you keep?

3. How would you describe the working relationship between Freshman Advisor and Peer Advisor?

4. Do you have any comments or suggestions that you would like to share with Peer Advisor organizers which you believe would help improve future Peer Advisor programs?

5. Do you have any words of wisdom for future peer advisors?

6. Do you have any questions you would like to ask, or feedback you would like to offer to:
   - The instructors
   - Freshman Advisors
Appendix B
Quantitative Survey

The following survey will be completed through survey monkey:

Interview Questions:

Please identify three important issues or topics that you feel should be addressed at august training as a peer advisor

Utilizing the following scale, please state your comfort level with the following:

1-Not Applicable  2-Not comfortable  3-Adequate  4-Comfortable  5-Very comfortable/confident

1. Lesson Planning
2. Student Development Theory
3. Facilitating Conflict Resolution
4. Promoting Diversity & intergroup Dialogue
5. Fostering Academic Excellence
6. Resources to make healthy life choices
7. Leadership skills
8. Academic Progress
9. Answering course registration questions
10. Providing academic support to First year students

In your opinion, which content areas are most important for assisting first year students:

Which of the following experiences did you find most meaningful for your role as a peer advisor?

- ITDY 220
- August Training with the Orientation Team
- ITDY 320/420

Comment (optional):

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!
Appendix C
Consent form

The follow consent form will be completed by participants in the focus group

St. John Fisher College
Informed Consent Statement Form

TITLE OF STUDY: Program Evaluation of the Peer Advisors

NAME OF RESEARCHER: Katherine Dayton (585/314-0891 or kdayton@sjfc.edu)

STUDY PURPOSE: You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Program Evaluation of the Peer Advisors. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the current training program offered to new and returning peer advisors.

APPROVAL OF THE STUDY: This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

PLACE OF STUDY: Conference Room 3, 2nd Floor of the Campus Center

LENGTH OF PARTICPATION: Approximately 60 minutes

CONFIDENIALITY: All data collected in this study will remain strictly confidential. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with any of the data. Furthermore, your data will be combined with the data collected from all other subjects.

METHOD FOR PROTECTING CONFIDENIALITY/PRIVACY:

YOUR RIGHTS: As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty
4. Be informed or appropriate alternative procedures of courses of treatment, if any that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study:

Printed name (participant) Signature Date

Printed name (researcher) Signature Date
Dear Ms. Dayton:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved the proposal entitled, “Program Evaluation of the Peer Advisors.”

Following federal guidelines, research related records should be maintained in a secure area for three years following the completion of the project at which time they may be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at 385-5262 or by e-mail to emerges@sjfc.edu.

Sincerely,

Eileen M. Merges, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

EM:jlm

Copy: OAA IRB
IRB: Approve exempt.doc
Appendix E

Quantitative Results

Question: Utilizing the following scale, please state your comfort level with the following:
1-Not Applicable 2-Not Comfortable 3-Adequate 4-Comfortable 5-Comfortable/Confident

Lesson Planning

Student Development
Facilitating Conflict Resolution

Promoting Diversity & Intergroup dialogue
Fostering Academic Excellence

Resources to make healthy life choices
Leadership Skills

Academic Progress
Answering course registration questions

Providing academic support to First Year Students